

The Last Sunday after Pentecost – Year C
Christ the King
25 November 2007
Saint Anne’s Episcopal Church
Lee’s Summit, Missouri

Colossians 1:11-20
Luke 23:35-43

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. AMEN.

Well, we have reached the last Sunday of the year – the church year, that is.

We have worked our way through the readings from the Gospel of Luke – and with the beginning of Advent and the new church year, we will begin our readings from Matthew’s Gospel.

We will put away the green stoles for awhile and bring out the purple of Advent.

Our worship services will be a bit quieter during Advent, as we try to take some time, amidst the hustle and bustle of this season in our culture, to prepare for the coming of Christ.

And, next week we will light the first candle of our Advent wreath, in anticipation of the final candle being lit on Christmas Eve.

Today, the last Sunday of the church year is designated as Christ the King Sunday. It is a day set aside to celebrate Christ’s messianic kingship and sovereign rule over all creation.

It seems like a fitting way to end the year, doesn’t it? After hearing for the past year Luke’s story of salvation – the restoration of all things in Jesus, the Christ....

From the angelic foretelling of the coming of John and Baptist and Jesus to their mothers,
Elizabeth and Mary...
to the story of a star and shepherds and a manger in Bethlehem...
to the initiation of Jesus's ministry...
then journeying with Jesus toward Jerusalem...
and now today, concluding with Jesus on the cross...

It does seem fitting to end the year with the strains of –

Crown him with many crowns the Lamb upon his throne.

Crown him, ye kings with many crowns, for he is king of all.

It has been said that nowhere in scripture is the largeness of the kingship, the rule and reign of Christ more sweepingly and eloquently expressed than in the grand affirmation we have in today's reading from the Letter to the Church at Colossae.

This passage affirms that God has “transferred” the faithful to the kingdom of his beloved son. The verb “transferred” here suggests being reassigned and relocated to a new place, a new home, a new calling. Moved out of the arena of death and disorder – the power of darkness – into a fully reconciled new life.

The words we have read are especially majestic about this new king who not only was the agent of creation but who also was the redeemer of creation.

Perhaps the most sweeping claim for this king is that “all things hold together in him.” The author of the Letter to the Colossians has asserted that Christ the King is the glue that literally keeps the cosmos together, the universe coherent so that things do not fall apart but instead each part relating rightly to the whole.

And, this is where I found myself working on Tuesday morning when I received a phone call from a dear friend.

It was good to hear Amy’s voice. You see, Amy was my “boss” in the seminary kitchen for one of my work study jobs. I worked with Amy for about two and a half years. She is sweet and creative and funny. And, over those two and a half years, she became like another daughter to me.

Well, it didn’t take long for me to realize that Amy was not calling with good news. She had been to see a doctor and the news was not good at all. At 27 years old, she was facing what could be a very scary, even life-threatening diagnosis. I tried not to cry while I was on the phone with her; I tried to be the best, most supportive, most calm friend I could be. But, inside, inside this news hit me so hard, it was just painful.

After I hung up the phone with Amy, I did cry. In fact, for awhile all I could do was cry and pray. And, after calling a friend to talk this news through a bit and pulling myself back together, I tried to get back to work on my sermon.

For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

In him all things hold together.

What does it possibly mean for Christ the King to be the glue that literally keeps the cosmos together, that makes the universe coherent when the world of someone you love may very well be flying apart and there doesn't seem to be much rhyme or reason to what is happening?

Hmmmm...now that's a difficult sermon to write. At least, it has been for me.

To be honest, I put the sermon away for awhile and tried to figure out what it means to me for Christ the King to be the one who holds everything together. Not what the commentators or scholars say but what it means to me.

I found myself reading the Gospel reading for today to try to figure what kind of "king" Jesus, the Christ, really is.

The reading from Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus hanging on a cross, being executed by the Roman Empire, along with two common criminals. Not exactly the kind of place you expect to find a king, especially one who is king of all kings and lord of all lords. But what we see in this reading is that Jesus is not a usual king, not the kind we expect at all.

This unusual king doesn't rule from a distance, making decrees from some heavenly throne. No, Jesus has reordered creation by grappling with the disorders of injustice, suffering, and death.

Jesus has literally waded right into the very core of death itself – submitting to death on a cross – to bring about something totally new. God with us – Emmanuel. And, Christ the King continues

to do that in our world, day-to-day pushing back the darkness of death and disorder one emergency, one injustice, one suffering person, one crisis of faith at a time.

Also, this highly unusual king is more concerned about the welfare of others than he is about his own welfare. While hanging on a cross, Jesus was taunted by the crowd to save himself if he were indeed the Messiah – God’s anointed one, the chosen.

Jesus did not save himself but instead granted clemency to another, clemency to one who actually deserved the punishment he was receiving. When one of the criminals asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, Jesus’ reply was clear, direct, and unequivocal.

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Well, have I figured it all out since last Tuesday? Have I gotten the complete answer to what it means for Christ the King to hold all things together in a world where the worlds of people I love can fall apart with no rhyme or reason?

Of course, the answer to that question is “no.” However, I have been strengthened in my faith in this king who created us and therefore knows us so perfectly. This king who loved us so much that he also came to redeem us, to reconcile us to God.

My faith has been strengthened in this king who doesn’t reign from a distance but who is in the midst of our struggles, who knows our struggles, and who day-by-day struggles with us.

My faith has been strengthened in this king who is more concerned with our welfare than with his own. This king who embodies sacrificial love and mercy.

I have been reminded that when my world or the world of someone I love seems to be flying apart that it is this king, Jesus the Christ, this one who somehow holds the cosmos together, who I want beside me. In the words of the old spiritual,

Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus,
You may have all this world, Give me Jesus.

AMEN.