



Christ the King Sunday St. Martin's North Vancouver November 20, 2016

Colossians 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 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. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

From the Letter to the Colossians:

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

About a month ago on an Abbotsford bus route a middle-aged female Latina Anglican bus driver encountered a difficult situation. A young white man got on the bus and a little while into the bus ride began asking her questions in a challenging tone of voice: Where were you born?” he asked. “Were you born in Mexico?”

The woman answered: “No. I was born in El Salvador.”

The young man was quiet for a while and then, suddenly continued, “Pretty soon they’re going to send you back to Mexico or to wherever you came from. If you hadn’t come here, I would have had your job. Pretty soon they’re going to send you back.”

At this point in the exchange a young Asian man who was also riding the bus got to his feet, came forward to where the bus driver’s seat was and simply began quietly standing beside her.

After a few more stops the young white man got off the bus. The Asian man turned to the bus driver and said: “You did great. You did really great. You remained peaceful. You remained calm.”

Today we celebrate what we call the Reign of Christ. What this means is that we get to explore what it’s like to be the citizen of two realms at the very same time: citizens of the world as it is with all its beauty, its terror and its challenges, and citizens of the realm of Christ, a realm that reflects the values of our God who became flesh and who walked the world in peaceful, self-giving solidarity with all.

And so today I wanted to tell you this story, a story that was told to me on a recent visitation to All Saints Anglican Church in Mission about an event that highlighted both something challenging that happened here in this country of ours and, at the same time, described something beautiful and I would say of God: an action that someone took that in a sense made the Reign of Christ and its values visible not only to a Latina woman but for us all.

Walter Brueggemann, my favorite scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, makes the point that many live lives that are captive to a vision of the world in which might makes right, in which we believe there is not enough to go around for everyone, in which fear drives people to resort to aggression in order to secure their own insecure lives and in which the Biblical value of neighborliness, the treatment of the other as kin, suffers. In his book entitled *The Hopeful Imagination*, Brueggemann tries to describe the importance of cultivating a different image of the world that will allow us to act in different way towards others. This is what he says: “The central task of ministry is the formation of a community with an alternative, liberated imagination that has the courage and the freedom to act on a different vision and a different perception of reality.” Today I would call this different vision, this different perception of reality “the Reign of Christ.”

Our reading for today from the book of Colossians is all about this realm. In it the author tells his own story about who and what he believes presides over the world and who or what he believes holds things together in our world. The author’s words are, of course, a hymn of praise about Christ:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 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 the fullness of God was

pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

In other words, the one through whom the world was created, the one who in fact holds the world together is none other than Christ Jesus, who walked the world in peaceful, self-giving solidarity with all: the one who lived his life as an outsider, the one who himself was yelled at on the bus, so to speak, the one who was rejected and despised by others, the one who was crucified and who did not fight back, the one who did not respond with vengeance, and did not try to take others down with him. This, the Reign of Christ says, is the kind of energy that has the power to hold the world together when many are afraid, has the power to settle the world down when many are tempted to strike back, has the power to bring us all back to ourselves when we are tempted to blame others for what we are struggling with in our own lives.

And so the realm that the Reign of Christ is getting at is not just some fantasy dream that will never actually arrive. No, it is a realm we all became citizens of at our baptism. And it is a realm we can access when we muster the courage and freedom to act on the alternative perception of reality that the author of Colossians describes. And often this means acting in the ways that Christ, himself, acted: standing with the oppressed when it would be easier to remain silent, making peace when it would be easier to make war, offering hospitality when all that is within us tells us to slam the door in the face of someone who scares us, seeking to forgive and to reconcile when it would be far easier to hold a grudge. When we do these things, we become citizens of the realm of Christ, and, I believe, we align ourselves with that creative spiritual power that underlies the very structure of the universe.

This, of course, is what I believe the young Asian man was doing on the bus in the story I told you earlier. He was aligning himself and assisting someone else in aligning herself with the creative Christ-like power that creates and holds everything together in this world of ours, a world that more than ever needs an energy that holds together rather than splits apart.

Today, we will be confirming Elizabeth. In this confirmation we will be praying for her as she strives to continue to live out her baptismal identity in the world. What will assist her in living out this identity will not just be her sense of resolve or even her sense of duty. Rather what will sustain her and inspire her will be her ability to imagine her citizenship in the realm of Christ, a realm that is as close to her as her very breath, a realm in which the values and actions of Christ hold everything and everyone together and in which we are irresistibly drawn into action.

This is the realm that belongs to her especially today. This is the realm that belongs to each of us every day.

