

Christ The King

November 25, 2007

Edwards (Knox) United Church
Reign of Christ Sunday

Luke 23:33-43

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Colossians 1:1-20

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Our narrative today focuses on Christ the King. A different kind of king - a king whose function is to bring compassionate/justice. A king whose very way of being is one of redemption and care of the least.

Jeremiah speaks to a people whose world has been turned upside down. Luke speaks to people whose world is in turmoil. The writer of Colossians writes to small community that feels it is being tested. This is the Sunday that is the Christian New Years. It is a tipping point in the church year. We begin to move again to Advent, looking for light to break through the cracks in our dark reality. We begin another time of waiting with anticipation, living into the future with hope, because of a confidence in the aims of God working for healing and forgiveness.

This is a time to meditate on the nature and character of God in what is experienced as in between times. This is an opportunity to stop to reflect on an power of love that surrounds us and can motivate us when we let it form our hearts. This is a time we can stop and probe our reality at a deeper level than shallow optimism. We can stop for a moment, and look into the shadow side of life and not be overwhelmed by it. To have a healthy sense of self, there are times to let the negative reality come to the surface, so we can see that it does not have ultimate power. We don't always have to look at the sunny side of life. In fact, there is evidence that by confronting negative experience we can gain a sense of realistic hope. It is by going through the valley of the shadow of death that we can live with confidence that the last word about life is love and hope. Hope in the sense that within the shifts and changes we can find images of transformation that will energize us to work to overcome the negative realities around us.

One of the functions of art is to give us vicarious experience, to use the imagination to face negative experience so that when real tragedy happens we have the resources to not to be undone by it. Psychologically teenagers love horror movies because they allow vicarious experience of fear and to be tested without it being actual terror. There have been studies that suggest that when things appear to be too good our visual artists increase their offerings of vicarious reality of horror, to address an unconscious sense that things are too good to be true. These art forms help us deal with that unconscious fear. We, through our artists, work out the ambiguities of existence. Crime shows do that and one of the most acclaimed is one called Dexter. There the hero is an avenging angel. It appeals to our primitive sense of justice that there is redemptive violence.

Our texts reject this vision. Yet one of the issues any religion faces is this primitive sense of redemptive violence and because of that we can misread our texts as saying redemption comes through violence. This is a misunderstand the meaning of the cross.

A careful reading of our narrative suggests otherwise. There is a realism about the world that violence is around us and suffering is experienced. There is tragedy that many have faced, and will face. The texts suggest that while this is true, such a reality does not have to define who we are and what we are about.

Our narrative suggests that within human and natural history there is a counter acting force of love. A force of love that seeks redemption and healing. And that force of love is built into the fabric of life, a

song that has been there from the beginning, and will always be there. And that song suggests that God is found in the midst of even the most horrific experiences, offering a word of hope and love.

Colossians uses the idea of the cosmic Christology. This is the idea that what is experienced in the historic person of Jesus is the aim of God that is directed to redemption and restoration. This aim of God was always there, and is now being worked out in daily experience.

This is the image of paradise as reality within history. This is not a waiting for a future state but that aim of God holds the future open. This can be experienced in the here and now. This is the rejection of all images that violence purifies. What is suggested is that in violent situations - in tragic situations - the aim of God is to bring redemption. This is to offer the hope that will motivate those who hear to be a countervailing force of love over against those things, and people, who seek ill will.

Knowing that life is redeemed creates a people - a person - who in the face of ill will will work to offer acts of kindness and hope. It is to say, yes, times are out of joint however the actual reality is one of love and healing. It is live out of paradise, creating paradise here within our experience.

Remember that horrific experience in the USA where a deranged man walked into the Amish school and killed five children. We recoiled at the sight, and many had a primitive response of wanting that man to suffer - to die in a like manner. Many expected a reaction of vengeance, and would have said yes, if the outcry was to demand capital punishment. After all our metanarrative is one of vengeance as cleansing.

No. That is not what happened. Against all reason the community offered forgiveness to the man. They went to his family and offered support and prayers. They said to Amy Robert, the killer's wife, - "stay in you home here." They said, "We have forgiven your husband . . . and we share your sorrow." "He, too, is a child of God."

It is interesting that there was some negative response to this act of forgiveness. What was hard to understand was that this was how their heart had been formed by their faith. A sense that from the beginning of time that God has been seeking the redemption of the world, to make good out of evil. They also knew that Jesus had offered an ethic that went beyond the golden rule to a standard of loving ones enemies. This does not mean state sanctioned consequences do not play a role, but that inner sense has to be one of redemption not punishment to appease our fears.

One writer reflecting on the Amish and their response suggested we have a power legacy full of surprising, imaginative and hopeful possibilities. Ruth says:

"What if the religions of the earth's billions would encode an elemental attitude of forgiveness rather than entitlement? What if those tempted to get even would be ingrained by nursery training with the mystery of forgiveness? What if the paradigm of the cross of Christ would become the logic of the human heart?"
(*Christian Century* Nov. 13, 2007 p. 36)

This is the story of God's participation in our living. God trusts us and needs us to give what we can to the well-being of the future. Our offerings maybe small and may appear as nothing, yet in God's hints of power they are transformative. They are transformative not because of what we did, they are transformative because we made our contributions an offering to God. We surrender their meaning to the ultimate meaning of God's redemptive powers. Power that we see in hints and pieces.

We are redeemed so we now work that out in life. The Christian journey is not about living for life beyond death. we are invited to live now the songs that give us a joyous image of the kingdom of God. To feel in our very being the presence of God. Where is God found? The Midrash responds . . . In life. Because of God's redemptive action all that is asked of us is to live well - now.

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