

Sermon

Last Sunday After Pentecost: The Reign of Christ

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [JEREMIAH 23:1-6](#); [CANTICLE 19 \(LUKE 1:68-79\)](#);
[COLOSSIANS 1:11-20](#); [LUKE 23:33-43](#)

Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical – or church – year: the Last Sunday After Pentecost, when we celebrate the Reign of Christ. This was originally a Roman Catholic Feast Day known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. It can be traced back to 1925, and its purpose was to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the “King of all kings” and as a way to bring God back into a secular world.

The Gospel passage assigned by the lectionary for today, Luke’s telling of Jesus’s crucifixion, is an interesting one for a day in the church year that is about Christ the King. It challenges typical associations we might have with kingship: Power. Dominion. Gold, jewels, crowns and scepters. Instead we have Jesus, vulnerable, suffering, with arms outstretched on the cross. A crown not of gold, but of thorns. The antithesis of power and dominion. We have Jesus, refusing to exercise power, and instead proclaiming forgiveness *for all*.

There is a legend about a sculpture of Christ the King by Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldson. It goes like this. He made a clay model for a statue of Christ the King, the arms raised in triumph. He left it to dry, but the weight of the soft clay was too much for the inner structure and in the morning the arms had sagged downwards, and so instead of triumph, the statue expresses welcome and forgiveness. Whether there is truth in this legend doesn’t matter: it reminds us of Jesus’s posture in the world: not a posture of triumph, but one with eyes, heart and arms open.

The passage we heard from the Letter to the Colossians brings us a cosmic Christ, having always been and always being. We heard: He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17)

From the prophet Jeremiah we heard God’s promise: “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock . . . I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” (Jeremiah 23:3)

Jesus, his arms outstretched on the cross, holds all things together.

Christ, having always been and always being holds all things together.

God gathers, and holds us – and all things – together. And what is it that holds all things together?

It's love. And compassion. Forgiveness. Humility. A posture of welcome, a posture with eyes, heart and arms open: this holds all things together.

Jesus, remember me. The words of the thief in our Gospel passage.

Re-member. Remembering is not just about memories, or stories of people and times past. Re-membering can also mean “putting back together”. Our world is full of the opposite of re-membering: there is dis-membering happening all around us. It happens in our own lives, it happens in the lives of those we love, in friend and in stranger. Pieces have been scattered and lost. Sometimes it is the circumstances of life that do the dis-membering, that leave scattered pieces: grief, violence, loss, shattered dreams, disappointment, guilt, regret. Sometimes our actions, our words, our thoughts create fragmentation and brokenness – in our own lives, and in the lives of others.

Re-membering: as followers of Jesus, re-membering is God's gift and grace, and it is our call, our way to be in the world. Last week, I spoke of the fabric of life: we are the weavers, called to healing and wholeness in places where the fabric of lives is torn and stained by brokenness, in places where lives have come undone. We are also called to re-member in this life.

When I think of re-membering, of putting back together, the image that comes to mind is the Japanese art of kintsugi: repairing pottery or ceramics with gold. Broken pieces are put back together – “re-membered” with seams of gold that emphasize the breaks, rather than disguising them.

Power, riches, status, glory: all the things that kings typically represent in our world can feel comfortable. We might be tempted by golden crowns in this earthly life: crowns of power, of status, of glory.

Jesus, in his earthly ministry, in his suffering, death and Resurrection shows us that golden crowns are not for us to wear. They are for us to melt down. For us to use to transform this world. We melt them down with both words and actions, and we use gold of love and compassion and welcome and forgiveness to repair brokenness – to re-member – in our world. Those

golden seams in that Japanese pottery are seams of love and compassion and forgiveness that hold brokenness, that “re-member” it into something beautiful.

Jesus spent his earthly ministry breaking apart that world’s structures of injustice, its oppressive social systems. Jesus’s earthly life shows us that it is possible to repair the brokenness that is brought about by abuse of power, by oppression, injustice and isolation. That brokenness can be repaired with love, and compassion, and community. It could be repaired then, and the brokenness in our world today can be repaired if we are willing to open our arms and our hearts – to be Jesus’s arms and hands and heart in the world.

When I spoke of the history of this day in our church calendar I mentioned that its purpose was to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the “King of all kings” and as a way to bring God back into a secular world. The questions of how to bring God back into a secular world is more resonant – more relevant – than ever.

Jesus, remember me. These words are more than a call to be granted entry into heaven. Jesus “re-members” us, and our world. Jesus is our way, as Christians, to bring God into the world.

We can do it by being the kind of king Jesus was. Jesus came to show us how to be in the world. He came, embodying the Christ who has always been, and is always being to show us the shape – the heart, the pattern – of God. That shape, heart, and pattern is love. It is compassion. It is connection. It is peace. That shape of God resists oppression, it overturns injustice.

We make connections whenever we gather here. We show compassion to each other and to all who come here when we take on a posture of welcome, and care and forgiveness with everyone who comes into this space. We make connections – with God, and with each other – when we gather for worship. And we are reminded to do that connecting, that re-membering when we leave this place and go into the world.

May Jesus, the Christ, re-member us, mending our brokenness and the brokenness of our world with seams of love and care and compassion and forgiveness, today, and always. In His name. Amen.