

Sermon 21 November 2010

Christ the King

Luke 23:33–43 Colossians 1:11–20

Words, pictures, symbols cannot express the completeness of God's vision present in Jesus and what it means to follow in the way of Christ. Today's readings provide only glimpses.

The powerful story of Jesus on the cross — tortured and dying, speaking forgiveness and reconciliation. The image of the shepherd in Jeremiah... and in Colossians, Christ is described as “first born of all creation”, an image (in Greek *icon*) of the invisible God, the visible manifestation in the world of who God is.

Which of these words or images or stories speak most powerfully to you about what it means to live together in Christ? To what response or action are these images calling you?... (*Seasons of the Spirit Congregational Life*, p106) .

Our lives also give a glimpse, tell stories of Christ and God in the world. Today is “Reign of Christ/Christ the King Sunday” — the last day of the church's year. Next week begins a new year, with Advent Sunday.

“Reign of Christ/Christ the King” is a recent addition to the church calendar. First in 1920s as a response to the perception of growing secularism ... but how does it connect today? For me it emphasises in a particular way, in connecting God with us, and provides a rich vocabulary of images to fill out this picture.

Yesterday I was leading a Quiet Day at St Mark's. There were three things I most enjoyed: first the silence and opportunity for quiet prayer and reflection,

second, the Closing Eucharist, a time of real focus and gathering, and

third, I loved hearing people's stories of their day — God present in the ordinary everyday lives of these beautiful diverse people. Yesterday I heard of two march hares — which became symbols of soul mates.

I heard of a family of magpies teaching their squawking young about finding food. I heard of the mud settling, of the beauty of creation. I heard of the freedom that the Spirit gives.

I was in awe of this group of people choosing to spend their day open to God, rather than reading the paper, digging the garden, watching the cricket or shopping — though these too can become occasions for encountering the divine.

I wondered about choices, mine and others. How do I choose to spend my time, and what does this say about my theology and the God I worship? What about you, what do your priorities say about your theology and the God you worship?

Delwin Brown has written a fascinating article worthy of reflection. Let me share it with you:

At its most general level, the doctrine of the incarnation means that we are at home in the world. We are at home in the world, precisely because God is. We belong to the world. Its ways are our ways...

In the birth of Jesus we see the gentleness and vulnerability of the divine. We believe that God works through ordinariness, not shock and awe, and that caring for the divine work of redemption is everywhere placed in our small human hands.

In the actions of Jesus we see the primacy of God's commitment to the neglected ones. We believe that advocating for the excluded — because of race, class,

gender, sexual orientation, and whatever other forms of exclusion become apparent to us — is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus.

In the compassion of Jesus for the least ones, we become aware of God's love for the creation, the web of being of which we are a part. We believe we are called to defend the integrity of the entire creation — human and non-human, spiritual and physical, simple and complex — as the creation loved by God.

In the parables and other teachings of Jesus, we hear God's challenge to every human convention, every status quo. We believe that God calls us to a world that is always more than we have, more than we ask for, more even than we can imagine.

In the persecution of Jesus we witness the seemingly intractable evil that the divine work of salvation everywhere faces. We believe that the redemptive process is a work, a struggle, the success of which is never automatic, its preservation never guaranteed.

In the crucifixion of Jesus we see the willingness of God to suffer and to die, with and for us, if that is what oneness with the world requires. We believe that God's commitment to the world is without limits because it is motivated by unlimited love.

In the resurrection of Jesus we experience the tenacity of a God who will not let go of us or the rest of creation. We believe that no defeat diminishes the divine resolve to seek the human good and the good of the entire created order of which we are but a part.

In Jesus Christ we believe we see intimations of a God who is incarnate — a God who is with us fully, and fully, too, with all creation.

And I have seen that light of Christ this week in a man dying. On Wednesday morning early I spent time with Bruce Pratt. We spoke of Marjorie, and of Rosemary and John and Michelle his beautiful family, and what a delight they are to him. We spoke with gratitude for God's loving presence throughout his life. We spoke of trust for the future — for him and for Marjorie ... that God is close and journeys with him, that love never ends.

In this conversation, in Bruce the light, the love, the presence of Christ were palpable.

Words, pictures, symbols, stories cannot express the completeness of God's vision present in Jesus ... But these, and the lives we share, the choices we make, can give us glimpses (of the divine).

For me, Christ the king is about looking for signs of God incarnate, God in the flesh in the world, and endeavouring to be myself and as a community a transparent witness to Christ in the world that people see through me and experience Christ's love, solidarity, and presence here.