

November 20, 2016

Christ the King Sunday, What Do We Choose?

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations to your hearts. And be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

Often throughout the church year, the proper's for any given Sunday are rich with images and an understanding of who Jesus is and what we are called to. Perhaps, this Sunday more than others, we have in the readings especially the Epistle and the gospel one of the clearest pictures of who Jesus is. What Jesus accomplishes and how we as human beings respond to the gift of Jesus Christ. In the Epistle for this morning, we hear Paul writing to the letter, his letter to the Colossians and surely this is what he has tried to teach them when he was establishing the church. When he was preaching and teaching among them but as he gets away from the church to travel to others, questions arise. We all need to be reminded, and they needed to be reminded. Who exactly this Jesus was. Because there were questions in the first century.

Was Jesus a man that God elevated to be the Messiah at the baptism of John? When the Holy Spirit descended upon him, up until that point was he simply like you and me? Fallible, sinful, and that changed with the giving of the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, no that wasn't it at all. We see him describing Jesus as the image of the invisible God. We hear him tell us tell the church of the Colossians that this Jesus, the divinity that we find in him is the very divinity that was the creative force of all that we see and all that we know. That it is the fullness of God that is dwelling in this person of Jesus.

And that it really came about because God and humanity came together. In Jesus, it was at the very moment of conception. And it came after human beings were able to know and understand that they could not attain a righteousness with God based on an external law. If you look through the whole of the Old Testament, after the fall from the dream that God had for creation, for humanity, to be in that perfect relationship. That relationship of love, that relationship of God caring for his creatures and his creatures being grateful and in love with their God. That was the dream of God at creation. That's the wording that our new presiding bishop Michael Curry uses. It was the dream of God. And that dream was broken as humanity sought its own will, sought its own way, sought its separation from God.

And we have through the Old Testament the story of God wanting to be reconciled but teaching humanity what that would require. We see God call a people, a chosen people out of all the Earth to give law. This is what it is to be in relationship, a loving relationship with God and with one another. This is my dream for you, for us. And yet we see that humanity continues to turn away, to break that relationship, to find a separation from God. In the midst of prosperity when God is providing so much, it becomes almost unbearable for humanity. They think they're on their own. And they fall away from the law, they fall away from that external law to find their own way. Time and again they are called back until we have finally understood, hopefully we have finally understood that that is not the way to salvation. That is not the way that God wants us to be. And we on our own are not able to attain it. To make real that dream of God.

And so, God unites with humanity in this person that we know as Jesus. The fullness of God and the fullness of humanity come together, to live a life, to show us what life can be like. To show us what the dream of God is really about. And he taught us, he taught us about the kingdom of God. He taught us about wholeness, wellness, love, caring, compassion, mercy, justice. And all that he did in the living out of his life. And still that was not enough. The very chosen people of God lead him to crucifixion. And there is when we really when we get an understanding of what God is doing for us. What Jesus is doing for us.

As even on the cross as he is being tortured, as his life is ebbing away, the humanity life is ebbing away. He looks to the very people who have brought him to the cross. He says, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." How crazy is that? That this man forgives the very people who are bringing him to death. And yet he was being obedient to the divinity within him. You see it's only the one who was present in creation. Only the one who has been present through the whole of our history. The word of God dwelling within the humanity of Jesus that can redeem what has been lost. Can make the dream of God real. Can offer it as a gift and a promise. And so, he reconciles creation, reconciles humanity to God as he hangs on the cross. And proclaims forgiveness because we don't know what we're doing.

We also have in this reading from the Gospel the choices that have to be made. How do we respond to this great gift of God? How do we respond to the dream of God that calls us to be in relationship with God and in relationship with one another? We have hanging on either side of Jesus the extremes if you will of the response, of the choice that has to be made. On one a person who doesn't believe, can't believe. And after all, let's give the person a break. How fantastic is this that God would unite with humanity, the God who created all things would somehow deem himself so low that he would join with humanity in order to offer some kind of redemption, some kind of reconciliation, some kind of salvation. That's amazing, beyond belief. And for many in the world it is just that, beyond belief. It was for the man being crucified and even as his life was ebbing away. He could only derive Jesus. If you're the Great Messiah, go ahead and save yourself and while you're at it, save us. You know let's just all get off these crosses and go our way. Isn't that the kind of response that we see around us even to this day. How foolish you are Christian to believe that there is a God, to believe that God would unite with humanity, to believe that God would give life. That a human would be so obedient to God that he would offer up himself as a sacrifice in obedience to God. To offer the likes of you, the likes of me some kind of eternal life in the presence of God. How foolish you are. That's a choice that can be made.

On the other hand, someone else life who's ebbing away. Here's the derision coming from the other side of Jesus. He's a bit ridiculous. You and I we're receiving the consequences for the deeds that we have done. We know that we have done wrong. We know in our hearts that this is what we deserve. But not this man. This man has come and he has taught about God and has taught about a kingdom where the dream of God comes true. Where people understand the great love that God has for them. Where they have the opportunity to return God's love. To see the wholeness that God wants for his people, for his creation. Undeserving as they are. Yes, we indeed deserve for our lives to ebb away. And yet because this one has seen and heard. He asks a simple question of Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Simple statement, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And then we have that powerful voice of Jesus. Today you will be with me in paradise. What you have asked you will receive. Because that's why I've come to reconcile broken creation, broken humanity, reconciled with God. Where a savior opens the door because an external law was never enough. But

now someone stands between you and your sin between your sin and God. And takes on the punishment and opens the door, the door to paradise. A door to the kingdom of God, a door to eternal life. That's our story. A story of brokenness, a story of education of learning how broken we are and yet how much God loves us. A story of God providing what we cannot achieve on our own. A savior that leads to life. A sacrifice for our sakes so that that gift can be given. But still a choice has to be made. A choice to either throw it away because it's just too fantastic to believe or to accept the truth of God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to reconcile humanity to God. That is our story but the choice is yours.