

2022.11.20 SERMON **Reign of Christ Sunday** ©Gyllian Daviest

Here we are at the end of the Christian year. Next week we begin our new year with the first Sunday of Advent. And here we are with the crucifixion of Jesus. But there's something else going on here that's really important and we might miss it if... we're focused only on the horror of the crucifixion. And that... is one of the important lessons of this morning's readings. Where do *you* put your focus? Where did the thief put his focus? Where did Jesus put *his* focus?

You could say that both Jesus and the thief are dwelling in the already Reign of Christ. That realm where forgiveness for anyone and everyone is 'of course!'. Where kindness towards those who are suffering is a necessity, and where this kindness, so necessary to God's reign, shines light on the solid reality of God's all-embracing love. Where our Creator, the Great Holy One, who created all that is and pronounced *all* to be very good, does not hold back from loving, forgiving, embracing all that has been created. Of course. How could it be any other way? Nobody excluded, no-one left behind, all creation precious to God. As one writer put it - "*There are no God-free zones in a world where God is concerned with the healing of everything and everyone.*" There are no God-free zones in a world where God is concerned with the healing of everything and everyone. Don't you just heave an inner sigh of relief when you hear that?!

Or, on the other hand, when we look around at the world we might say, "Oh my goodness, it's a long way away, the realm of Christ, there's not much sign of it here on earth that I can see!" We might say, "Look, there are people busy killing other people everywhere." We might say, "While the UN is delivering food supplies for those desperately hungry people in areas of war, natural disasters, drought etc... there are people busy stealing that food to sell it and fatten their wallets!" We might say, "I just read that 85% of the world's wealth is concentrated in the hands of 10% of the people, and... there are unhoused, unfed, unloved people without essential medical care everywhere I look.." And we might wonder how the Reign of Christ could possibly be alive and well on earth.

So what do we do? We start with ourselves. We look for the reign of God within our own hearts... This is how we become part of the realm of Christ ourselves - we look into our own hearts, our deepest thoughts, and make sure the realm of Christ is alive and well in us, in our hearts and minds. And how do we do that? We do that by nourishing our souls. We make sure that we get enough of whatever it is that we each need. Enough sleep! Enough water to drink. Enough quiet time and down time when we just get to be still and be with ourselves. And be with God! We need to make sure we've got time with friends. And given that we've each chosen to live on this island I think it's safe to say we each need to make sure we get time to simply be in nature, whether that's sitting among the trees, walking or biking up one of the mountains, wandering along the water's edge, or being out on a boat. Whether your soul food is in the forest or our gardens, on top of one of the mountains, on the beach or on the waters, we all need to make sure we get that time for ourselves. Because when we

have these things we need we will find it much easier to hold the realm of Christ, the realm of God, in our hearts. And when we can hold it in our hearts it's much easier to live it out into the world. Actually, without the realm of God alive and well in our hearts we are incapable of living God's love out into the world authentically. So that's where we start. Cultivating self-love, self-nourishment, and gratitude in the garden of who we each are. That's our first step.

Did I make it sound easy? Sometimes it will be the hardest thing you've ever done. And that's when it's crucial to remember it's ok to ask for help. We can ask another human for help. We can ask God for help. Have you noticed there are people asking Jesus for help all through the gospels? Do you think maybe it just might be possible the abundance of these stories has a purpose? Like maybe reminding us to ask for help? One of the hardest things to do, isn't it! Relying on each other.

Another thing is we can do is find evidence of the realm of God in the world around us. And it's super important for us to look for and find that evidence of the realm of Christ alive and well in the world because that is part of what gives us hope. Hope is essential for going on with. When we find that evidence of the realm of Christ already existing in the world around us we will find ourselves restored and renewed, awakened to possibilities in life.

Feeling hopeful is a discipline. It's not just a happy accident that some days we get to feel hopeful. We feel hope because we cultivate it, we work it, we choose to see the world as essentially good. We feel hope because we take actions - we pray, we give thanks, we look for ways to make life easier for others. The spiritual teacher, Andrew Harvey wrote a book called The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism. He begins it with Ten Things You Can Do Right Now. Here's a few of them:

One - every day write down one thing that makes you glad to be alive. This is a discipline - because you do it every day. Discipline is the practice of being a disciple, isn't it. So, you keeping track here?

Two - each day write down ten things that are sacred to you. Just off the top of your head. Every day you do this. The list will change. That's a good thing. Here's a few things from Andrew's list the day he wrote that part of his book: justice, cats, the first roses of summer, wise elders everywhere who share their wisdom tenderly and tactfully, the voice of Marie Callas... Do this he says and "You will find you start to be inspired by your deepest values, beliefs and sources of emboldening joy."

Three - Read a short text from any of the world's religious traditions that inspires you with the love-wisdom of the prophets and mystics. I add to my sources poets like Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry and Gerard Manley Hopkins. What are your sources of inspiration, your personal wells of love-wisdom? Are you reading them regularly? If not, start right away. Don't delay.

We always have a choice on where we focus. We can focus on what's wrong, what's missing, what's broken and wounded... Or we can focus on what's amazing,

miraculous, profound,

Like this from a poem by David Whyte:

THE OPENING OF EYES *David Whyte*

That day I saw beneath dark clouds  
the passing of light over the water  
and I heard the voice of the world speak out.  
I knew then as I had before  
life is no passing memory of what has been,  
nor the remaining pages in a great book waiting  
to be read.

It is the opening of eyes long closed.  
It is the vision of far off things  
seen for the silence they hold.  
It is the heart after years  
of secret conversing  
speaking out loud in the clear air.  
It is Moses in the desert  
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.  
It is the man throwing away his shoes  
as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,  
opened at last,  
fallen in love with solid ground.

Fallen in love with solid ground. The earth, the beautiful earth. Our lives, our  
beautiful lives.

Amen.