

ALL CREATION HELD IN WISDOM AND LOVE

Reign of Christ Sunday

November 24, 2013

Jill R. Russell

Texts: Jeremiah 23.1-6;
 Luke 1.68-79;
 Colossians 1.11-20;
 Luke 23.33-43

Last Sunday when I was talking with the children I am afraid I created a little confusion in the worship centers upstairs. I told them that last Sunday was the final week in that long Ordinary Time that the children call "the growing season." So they expected that today was the start of the new church year and the start of Advent. Who can blame them? I suspect a lot of us forget about this liturgical New Year's Eve called the Reign of Christ Sunday. For those of us who do remember, I suspect I am not alone in having a rather ambivalent feeling about this day that has been called Christ the King Sunday in the past. The ambivalence comes from the traditional prayers and hymns for this day. They can feel rather triumphalist. If Christ is King of all creation then doesn't that mean in the marketplace of religious ideas that Christianity reigns supreme? And isn't that a very small step from the rationale that drove the crusades which is if Christianity reigns supreme then shouldn't Christians reign? Maybe the kids are onto something. Maybe we should just move from the growing season right into Advent and set this day aside.

As I was reading the texts for this day, I became glad we don't as uncomfortable as it may seem to dive into this theological terrain as our hearts and minds are moving toward Thanksgiving tables. The writer of Colossians offers a brilliant and profound meditation for us today that steers us completely around the triumphalism we want to avoid.

I've been taken this week by this claim that in Christ (and what I mean by Christ is the Word, capital W - the part of God, who dwelt in the person of Jesus of Nazareth making him the Christ which means the anointed one) in Christ all things hold together. In Christ, ALL things -- visible and

invisible – human and nonhuman – even the powers, the rulers, the structures of society – in ancient times the kings in our time the congress, the President, the city council, the consistory – all things are held together.

All things held together in Christ. That means that we, as Christians, do not see the world in dualistic terms as if the realm of God was one side and the realm of evil was on the other as two opposing, equal powers battling for supremacy. In this view, our job as Christians making our way through life is to decide who belongs where. A dualistic worldview allows us to divide up the world between what is spiritual and what is worldly, who we should associate with and who we should avoid. In that worldview a celebration of the Reign of Christ very quickly becomes a triumphalist celebration of our victory and domination over evil (insert here whoever we see as our current enemy).

But if instead everything, ALL things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, have been created and are STILL held together in Christ, then there is only one realm and we are all a part of it. So every place we go, every person that we meet, and every part of our life belongs to God's realm. The work of God's Spirit in the world, and therefore our work, is a work of reconciliation, making peace, and shedding light in those dark corners so that every place we go and every person that we meet and every part of our life will begin to resemble the goodness and the beauty and the glory that God intends.

There is no question that every place we go and every person that we meet and every part of our life has in some way been corrupted. At times that corruption is so profound as to render the original goodness and beauty unrecognizable. There are powers of darkness both personal and corporate that touch and taint every square inch of our world. The darkness is like a cloud that descends that is so thick you cannot see. The work of the Spirit is to bring light to scatter and disburse the darkness. And so we do talk in the liturgy of baptism in terms of turning away from those powers of sin and of evil and turning toward the light of Christ. Some scholars believe that this passage from Colossians is from an early

baptismal liturgy¹. You see that same imagery of being transferred from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved. This transfer is not moving from one camp to another, though. The transfer is an ongoing work of the Spirit in us and in all creation of letting the light and wisdom of Christ infiltrate every square inch of our world until every place and every person has the opportunity to find peace once again with the God who created them.

Some days we can see the light infiltrating the darkness but some days it seems like the darkness is everywhere. This is precisely why we need to celebrate the Reign of Christ Sunday to hear again the voice of God through the prophet say to us: "I will gather you back out of the lands where I have driven you....or from Colossians to hear that "in Christ all things hold together."

I was talking with someone this week about how we can try to turn ourselves toward God and see where the Spirit is moving and what the realm of God is really like but more often than not the reign of God simply breaks in on us so that all of a sudden we see it clearly for a moment. I was remembering this week a conversation I had with a friend who is a Lutheran theologian when that occurred. It was on the Saturday afternoon just before The Reign of Christ Sunday a few years ago. He was in a terrible place of being overwhelmed with grief again over the divorce he went through a few years before. He just learned that his ex-wife is getting remarried. That information opened up all the old wounds again. He was looking at his life and the ways he was so stuck and the painful consequences of his failures. So we sat together and we cried about all of the pain and all of the disappointment. As I stood to leave he said (and this is where it is relevant to know that he is Lutheran theologian because ordinary people don't talk like this) "Its times like these that really make you long for the new earth."

¹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1992), 66. Wink is quoting from another source: Ernst Kasemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 162.

When he said that, I felt this tremendous shift. He was not talking about things being easier once we die and go to heaven. He was talking about the time when the reign of Christ will fully come. When he drew our attention away from the immediate mess of life we'd been talking about and focused our attention instead on the truth that Christ holds all things together (including his broken heart) it was as if something larger than ourselves was brought into the equation. It was as if focusing on the realm of God as it will one day be pulled all this stuff that will be available then and there and made it available to us here and now.

Maybe the Reign of Christ Sunday is the perfect way to enter the week of Thanksgiving. When we know that all things are held together in Christ suddenly, even if we are struggling and life is hard and the darkness seems overwhelming, we have something for which we can give thanks!

Hear again this passage from Colossians as a call to our Thanksgiving tables:

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from God’s glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to God, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.”

Thanks be to God!