

Sermons for the Journey

The Rev. Duncan A. Burns
Christ the King – Year A - 2017
Sunday, November 26, 2017

The collect for Christ the King Sunday is “Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things to your beloved son, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

As our lectionary year with Matthew comes to an end, we await the coming of God’s Kingdom, a time when the hungry will be fed, the thirsty will be given something to drink, the stranger will be welcomed, the naked will be clothed, the sick will be taken care of and the prisoner will be visited. My question for today is, “How will God restore all things to Christ the King?” To answer how God will restore all things to Christ, we first look at God’s commitment to the people of God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. “The LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 100 NRSV). The “Steadfast love” of God that endures forever is translated *hesed*, which in Hebrew is the covenant love of God. God’s love and mercy are constantly flowing towards us, but to complete the process of restoration, God asks for something. God calls for a two way relationship. God asks us to be thankful and worship with joy in our heart. God asks that one day a week, we rest from our labors and worship the Lord.

The goal of true religion is a change of heart to bring us into a deeper relationship with God. Charles H. Spurgeon said, “Have your heart right with Christ, and he will visit you often, and so turn weekdays into Sundays, meals into sacraments, homes into temples, and earth into heaven.” When we draw closer to God, instead of our culture detracting from our sabbath, our resting in God permeates our whole lives. In the New Testament Paul says: “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power” (Ephesians 1:17-19). Have you had the eyes of your heart enlightened? People of God have always longed for wholeness, but after thousands of years people still think we can accomplish it by ourselves.

We scamper around like squirrels gathering nuts before winter because we are uncertain of what tomorrow will bring. We find our hope in places like the lottery and we sedate ourselves with alcohol and opioids to obscure our own helplessness. We spend our money on useless objects and eat so much it actually hurts, often with no thought whatsoever to those who are suffering and starving around the world. We continue to divide ourselves in like-minded groups, even going to war over our petty

differences. Just this week in Egypt Sunni Muslims murdered 305 other Muslims because Sufi Muslims worship differently than they do at their mosque. Men use their wealth and power for their own selfish desires without any thought of the consequences to those they abuse. It is sickening that one in four women will be sexually assaulted in their lives, but it is even sadder that most of these crimes have gone unreported in the past because it was often the victim that faced the harshest penalties when allegations have been made. In the past month, allegations of sexual misconduct have been brought against Harvey Weinstein, Charlie Rose, Kevin Spacey, Roy Moore, Louis C.K., Al Franken, John Lasseter, and dozens more. The Catholic Church is still facing allegations of sexual misconduct that were ignored for decades while pedophiles were reassigned again and again to unsuspecting congregations. "Me too" postings on the media have emphasized the breadth of the problem and the need for men to change their habits or face the consequences. We reach a place where the very fabric of God's creation is torn by human actions and bad choices, but it is also in this place of confusion and sorrow that we look again for the connection that will make us whole.

Do you remember the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke? The rich man walks past poor Lazarus every day during his life. When the rich man dies he is tormented by thirst. He asks Lazarus to dip his finger in cool water to cool his burning tongue, but the rich man is so distant from God that there is a giant chasm between him and Lazarus. The rich man then pleads to tell his five brothers. Father tells him that if they won't believe Moses and the prophets, they probably won't even believe it if he rises from the dead.

The bible tells us that there will be consequences for our actions, but we have a chance to change our hearts and be forgiven, Christ died on a cross that we might change our heart and be forgiven. That doesn't mean continuing to live in sin or by walking by Lazarus at the gate every day.

Jesus came that we might have life and live it abundantly. Jesus is a light to all nations, an alternative to the self-indulgent madness, greed, fear, and anxiety that is prevalent in society today. To the poor he brings hope. To the rich he brings water that will quench a thirst that money and possessions just can't satisfy. Jesus gives us the free will to follow his path to glory, but this course does not come without a price. Grace is costly because Jesus had to die on a cross for all the collective sins of the world. In return, God asks us to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors. Desmond Tutu describes a light bulb that shone brightly and proudly. "[It] began to strut about arrogantly, quite unmindful of how . . . it could shine so brilliantly, thinking that it was all due to its own merit and skill." One day the light bulb is taken out of the socket and placed on a table. "Try as hard as it could, the light bulb could bring forth no light and brilliance. . . . It had never known that its light came from the power station. We all need to long to be in unity with our God, who is the source of all light.

Jesus turns the world upside down starting with us. Those who were once victims are filled with the Holy Spirit and enter into relationship with God in a way that transforms their lives from misery to joy. The stranger is welcomed, the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed.

Today's Gospel says that there will be a day when each of us will meet our Lord. To those who love him, he will say, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matt, 25:34-36). For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that all who believe in him might have everlasting life. God restores all things through his steadfast love and his enduring truth. Augustine once said that, "My heart is restless until it rests in you."

Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; * serve the LORD with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.

Know this: The LORD himself is God; *

he himself has made us, and we are his;

we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; *give
thanks to him and call upon his Name.

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; * and his faithfulness
endures from age to age (Psalm 100). **Amen.**