

*“Coming Full Circle...Into
Hope...Again!”*

Revelation 1: 4b-8, John 18: 33-37
“Christ the King Sunday”

November 25, 2018

Rerun of November 22, 2015

What we have here is a failure to communicate! Jesus and Pilate are talking on two different planes and never the two shall meet...almost like they are talking about two different things....actually, they are!

Pilate is talking about power.
Jesus is talking about truth.

Not the kind of truth revealed by brilliant minds, or scientists, or even kings or heads of state.

But the kind of truth revealed in the sanctity of the human heart...a truth that can empower all of life to be different.

Jesus says this kind of truth sets you free!

Sets you free even though (like for Him) professing it/living into it may kill you off...

kill a part of your spirit or the past or the present...

or kill off your usual sense of security or ways of doing things or thinking.

Facing the truth will either be life giving/freeing or life stopping/death dealing!

How we use the truth chooses its outcome for us.

You recognize this freeing kind of truth as soon as you encounter it... not because someone important names it for you,

but because a still small voice within breathes it into your very awareness. Sorta' like a self-awareness within the “great holy consciousness”.

But really now! A King! We postmodern people, we don't want a king! We know better than to want the kind of king Pilate speaks of....

just look at the kings and queens of our times...if having power was the key to life, they should be living happy lives and everyone in their nations as well. (Buzzer!) Isn't happening!

No, we don't want a king lording over us!

Or, do we? Hmn.

Gee, aren't we constantly seeking that king who will rule over us in the sense they will solve our problems?

You know...king for a day...that newest diet, the latest trend in management, yet another book or manual,

a better leader, a different schedule, a quick retaliation.

If only something or someone would come in and rule us and tell us what to do to get it right for ourselvessurely we'd do it!

Someone will.

But not through "power over" or "thinking for you" or "getting you out of this mess" you/we've created.

Someone is. God is. God rules.

But it's not the usual rule of life.

Jesus' life and ways reveal to us the new rule is not the rule of power over, or law, or quick fixes,
not terrorizing family members or nations
into submission.

These worldly ways don't last and so don't work in the long run! Look at Hitler. He squelched truth.

He was stopped.

Evil is real. Evil will try to get a foot hold. But, has no energy of its own...unlike love! Its energy is dependent upon emptied people's vulnerabilities! If life, addiction, oppression, hatred, depression empty you out, you are vulnerable to Evil! So fill yourself up to keep Evil at bay! Evil succumbs to love in the fullness of its insight and power and truth. Evil abates!

Jesus says the new rule, the way to address is evil,
is the rule of truth.

What is truth?

I think in our deepest, purest self each of us
knows the truth.

It's just so hard to face and even harder to do anything about.

But....it will set you free.

God so longs for you to be free, at peace!

Jesus lives what is truth. And, unlike the line in the popular movie....“you can't handle the truth!”....
Jesus knows you can!

Forget the movies. Forget Facebook!

God says, “Yes you can handle the truth!”

You begin to handle it as you begin to let in, even in the smallest of ways, the ways of Jesus, the love of God, the courage of the spirit ruling in your life.

You see we may be so sophisticated we think we don't want a king....but we need one!
Wow!

Do we ever need one!

We need a powerful new truth to rule our lives.

Jesus' power is in you. And your power is in the truth revealed in you about you.
God trusts you to rule your own life with dignity and grace in the light of truth....which brings freedom. Jesus only rules through you!

And the good news is....God never gives up on any of us, any situation...in our family, in our church, in our world...until the truth is known and freedom is released.

God outlasts what is wrong. God is the Alpha and the Omega, who is and was and will be.

True power and authority belong to Christ through you....as you meet the prisoner, the one sick, the one thirsty, the one oppressed, the refugee and the terrorist...within, next to you, over there in France!

Christ's power is known to us in love and freedom.

Christ's love is now. It is immediate.

The crises and the problems that beset us do not define us. The truth empowers us.

This is our hope made really, real....for those who believe and act out of it!

We each have the power of truth which enables us to build up the reign of God OR ignore truth/deny it, and tear down the reign of God.

But before you can build up or tear down, you have to be able to see that everything we do affects the reign of God...the kin-dom...
how we handle arguments, disappointments, anger and fear, stress, play, money, the news.

...*Sandra* felt very low as she pushed open the florist shop door to buy a floral arrangement for her Thanksgiving Day table. Her life had been easy, like a spring breeze.

Then in the fourth month of her second pregnancy, a minor automobile accident stole her ease.
During this Thanksgiving week she would have delivered a son. She grieved over her loss.

As if that weren't enough, her husband's company threatened a transfer.

Then her sister, whose holiday visit she coveted, called saying she could not come.

What's worse, Sandra's friend infuriated her by suggesting her grief was a God-given path
to maturity that would allow her to empathize with others who suffer.

"She has no idea what I'm feeling. Thanksgiving? Thankful for what?" she wondered. For a careless driver whose truck was hardly scratched when he rear-ended her? For an airbag that saved her life but took that of her child?"

"Good afternoon, can I help you?"

"I . . . I need an arrangement."

"For Thanksgiving? Do you want beautiful but ordinary, or would you like to embrace the day with a customer favorite I call the Thanksgiving 'Special?'"

"Are you looking for something that conveys 'gratitude' this Thanksgiving?"

"Not exactly! In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong. And now the world is in a scary chaos!"

Sandra regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the shop clerk said, "I have the perfect arrangement for you."

Then the door's small bell rang, and the shop clerk said, "Hi, Barbara, let me get your order." She politely excused herself and returned carrying an arrangement of greenery, bows, and long-stemmed thorny roses.

Except the ends of the rose stems were neatly snipped. There were no flowers.

"Want this in a box?"

Sandra watched for the customer's response. Was this a joke? Who would want rose stems with no flowers! She waited for laughter, but neither woman laughed.

"Uh," stammered Sandra, "that lady just left with uh . . . she just left with no flowers!"

"Right. I cut off the flowers. That's the Special. I call it the Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet."

"Oh, come on, you can't tell me someone is willing to pay for that!"

"Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling much like you feel today. Disgusted, overwhelmed, hopeless.

She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she was facing major surgery.

That same year I had lost my husband and for the first time in my life, I had just spent the holidays alone. I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel.

"So what did you do?" asked Sandra.

"I learned to see the beauty of thorns," answered the clerk quietly. "I've always thanked God for good things in life and never asked God why those good things happened to me, but when bad stuff hit, did I ever ask!"

It took time for me to learn that dark times are important. I have always enjoyed the 'flowers' of life, but it took thorns to show me the beauty of God's comfort and possibility for what is yet to be!

Sandra sucked in her breath as she thought about the very thing her friend had tried to tell her. "I guess the truth is I don't want comfort. I've lost a baby and I'm angry with God."

Just then someone else walked in the shop. "Hey Bill!" called the clerk to the balding, rotund man.

"My wife sent me in to get our usual Thanksgiving arrangement...twelve thorny, long-stemmed stems!"

"Those are for your wife? Do you mind me asking why she wants something that looks like that?"

"No . . . I'm glad you asked," Bill replied. "Four years ago, after forty years of marriage, children, and grand and great-grandchildren, our family was in a real mess with all sorts of problems, but leaning on our faith, we slogged through problem after problem. God resided with our family as we faced our truths..."

Jenny here (the clerk) told me she kept a vase of rose stems to remind her of what she learned from "Thorny" times; and that was good enough for me.

I took home some of those stems.

My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific "problem" and give thanks for what that problem brought to light about ourselves and what we really wanted for our lives and were willing to do about it."

As Bill paid the clerk, he said to Sandra, "I highly recommend the Special!"

"I don't know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life." Sandra said to the clerk. "It's all too . . . fresh."

"Well, my experience has shown me that thorns make roses more precious. We treasure God's providential care more during trouble than at any other time.

Remember, it was a crown of thorns that Jesus wore so we might know His love and peace. Don't resent the thorns. Do something with them."

Tears rolled down Sandra's cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on resentment.

"I'll take those twelve long-stemmed thorns, please".

"I hoped you would. I'll have them ready in a minute."

"Thank you. What do I owe you?"

"Nothing. Nothing but a promise to allow God's hope into your heart. The first year's arrangement is always on me."

The clerk smiled and handed a card to Sandra with the arrangement.

It read, "Dear God, I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but never once thought about the thorns with You. Open me to the beauty in thorns and meaning in roses.
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We each have a choice in how to see the things that happen to us, around us, in the world....  
*and more importantly,*

we have a choice in how to shape the things that will happen next....just like Jesus as he stood with a crown of thorns before Pilate.

Just like now when we face personal thorns and worldly ones!

What we say and do matters.....it makes life empty or full....makes new things happen or not....builds up our families, our church, our community or not.

If we/you don't validate your own feelings,  
and don't claim your own power in re-framing  
the things that happen to you and around you,

things will never change for you....you will stay stuck and resentful or downcast or angry or confused.

**So, if you're tempted to dump on the people around you....complain about things at home or around here, throw in the towel about what's going on in the world? Good.**

Jesus invites us to feel our feelings, to really look at what's going on.

But then, Jesus invites us to respond in new ways,  
to play by a different set of rules....not to react the way we've always reacted.

God encircles us in hope before and beyond all the times of our lives.

Will we see hope, see the truth?

Will we act locally and think globally? And vice-versa?

Will we act globally through the networks of PCUSA and others to stand up for truth?

Will we be overcome by fear or rise  
to a courageous fear that embraces truth...

addressing terrorism in the world and its causes as well as what terrorizes individual  
hearts and souls?

Isn't it ironic! Jesus is put to death because they were afraid he was a king.  
Jesus is born into the world's hope that he would be that king.

Do you get it?  
No?

Fear not....Advent is coming again.  
Another time around the stories and wisdom of our faith to find insight into our own  
lives,

the freedom of truth, the courage to be resurrected,  
the chance to integrate the new you into the ordinary times of your life.

There is something bigger and more powerful than you...bigger and more powerful  
than the supposed limitations of this life in which you struggle.

There is a real God waiting to be discovered and rule with you!

Why....just listen to this snippet of conversation between a modern day interviewer  
and one really old guy who finally came to the realization God is bigger and more  
powerful than life.....

### Christ the King Sunday

2015 year old man and an interviewer...quite a ways into an interview:

Interviewer: "Did you always believe in the Lord?"

Old Man: "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshipped him."

I: You worshipped a guy named Phil? Why?

Man: Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands.

I: Did you have prayers?

Man: Yes, would you like to hear one? ‘O Phil, please don’t be mean and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands.’

I: So when did you start worshipping the Lord?

Man: Well, one day a big thunderstorm came up and a lightning bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead. Then we said to one another, ‘There’s somethin’ bigger than Phil!’

Moral:

There is something bigger than Phil.  
There is something bigger than me.  
There is something bigger than you.  
There is something bigger than all of us put together.