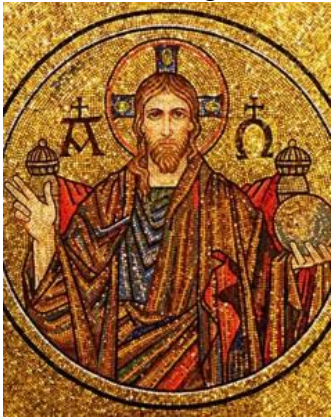


This Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, is the last Sunday of our liturgical year. We use a 3-year calendar, A, B and C for our readings each Sunday and at the end of the cycle of the year the readings point to Christ's reign here and now. God's reign in which we participate now, upends our self-directed attentions, and moves our hearts and minds to following Christ. In the scripture for this Sunday from year B, Pilate asks Jesus about the accusation that Jesus is King of the Jews. Jesus answers that his kingdom is not from this world, meaning that the Way of Life of compassion, justice and truth is not one guided by values of greed or power, but by serving one another. It is not the way of Caesar, of slavery and exploitation. In the Gospel of John, we see another way; Jesus, teacher, and leader, bends down to wash the feet of his friends and followers. We see compassion when he heals the woman at the well who is not a Jew and sends her forth to tell the story of God who grants life by giving living waters that quench our spiritual thirst. This gift of love is Love that is meant to be shared with all creation.

In the scripture from John this week—which we normally associate with Holy Week--we are reminded that Christ's reign is *now* and that we participate in this Life through our relationship with Christ.



Kingship or Reign is not a helpful metaphor for our contemporary experience. Finding another way to describe our relationships means we need to have diverse multi-cultural descriptions. Words like family, parts of one body, community, One Body, tribe, friends, gathering, and people of God, all point toward a mystery of being part of the mystical communion in Christ.

In the Baptism service we use the words “household of God” and are invited to think about each other as family, related by the power of the spirit. Indeed, we are empowered to care for one another and the world by the power of this same Spirit. Another way to consider Pilate's question—

“What is truth?” is to know that Christ's Love is in all. Death no longer has the power to separate us; betrayal and sin is overcome in love. When we abide in Christ, we abide in the Love that manifests itself to us, in us and all around us.

Even now, as we pray, God is creating a new heart in us in the power of Christ.

Pastor Susan

Unveiling the Great (Christ) Mystery

This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wanted everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message. —Colossians 1:26–27, The Message

The Christ Mystery that Paul speaks of in Colossians is the indwelling of the Divine Presence in everyone and everything. Paul was a mystic of the first magnitude, which explains why he was able to see Christ everywhere. When I use the word “mystic” I am referring to experiential knowing instead of just textbook or dogmatic knowing. The difference tends to be that the mystic sees things in their wholeness, their connection, their universal and divine frame, instead of just their particularity. Mystics get the whole *gestalt* in one picture, as it were, and thus they go beyond our more sequential

and separated way of seeing the moment. In this they tend to be closer to poets and artists than to linear thinkers.

Obviously, there is a place for both perspectives, but since the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there has been less and less appreciation of such seeing in wholes. We limited ourselves to rational knowing and the scientific method. So, in our time, this deep mode of seeing must be approached as something of a reclamation project. After the Western Church separated from the East in the Great Schism of 1054, we gradually lost the profound understanding of how God has been liberating and loving *all that is*.

Mystics throughout the ages, however, knew Christ as *another name for everything*—in its fullness. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 394) wrote “For who, when [taking] a survey of the universe, is so simple as not to believe that there is Deity in everything, penetrating it, embracing it, and seated in it?” [1] Rhineland mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1212–c. 1282) proclaimed, “The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things.” [2] And twentieth-century Trappist mystic Thomas Merton (1915–1968) wrote, “Christ prayed that all people might become One as He is One with His Father, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when you and I become what we are really meant to be, we will discover not only that we love another perfectly but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ.” [3]

This week’s meditations will highlight various contemporary and ancient voices who have understood the “rich and glorious secret” of Christ inside and out, everywhere, and in all things.

References: [1] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 25, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* (Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1917), 495.

[2] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of God*, 2.19, in *Meditations with Mechthild of Magdeburg*, versions by Sue Woodruff (Bear & Co.: 1982), 46.

[3] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions: 1972), 150–151. Note: Minor edits made to incorporate gender-inclusive language.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), 1, 4. Sunday, August 22, 2021