

Sermon

Last Sunday After Pentecost: The Reign of Christ

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: JEREMIAH 23:1-6; CANTICLE 19 (LUKE 1:68-79); COLOSSIANS 1:11-20; LUKE 23:33-43

Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical – or church – year: the Last Sunday After Pentecost, when we celebrate the Reign of Christ. Some of you may know that this was originally a Roman Catholic Feast Day known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. It can be traced back to 1925, and its purpose was to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the “King of all kings” and as a way to bring God back into a secular world.

The word - the idea of - “king” sets many of us on edge, stirring up thoughts of hierarchy, power, domination, even corruption. Luke’s Gospel offers us a scene today - the scene of Jesus’s crucifixion - where those around Jesus cannot separate the idea of kingship from force and self-protection. The religious leaders, the soldiers - and even one of the criminals joins in - they mock Jesus, not able to understand how, if he is a king, he wouldn’t save himself. Jesus did subvert this notion of kingship. He had no desire to rule as human monarchs sometimes do: with coercion or domination. Jesus came not to rule over humanity but to live *among* us, to be *with* us.

There is a word hidden in the word king: it’s **kin**. This was Jesus’s focus in his ministry, and it was behind his willingness to suffer and die. Jesus

reveals that God's dream for the world is rooted in *kinship*—in recognizing one another as created, held, and cherished by the same God. In kinship, and in a kin-dom there is no us-and-them, there is no either-or, there is no winner and loser.

Many of you know that part of my Diocesan work is on the board of Belong Ottawa—one of the Community Ministries of our Diocese. Last Saturday, along with other board members from Belong Ottawa and other boards of social service agencies from across the city participated in "The Empathy Project" at the Alliance to End Homelessness. We participated in a simulation of a day in the life of individuals who are struggling within our social services system. In order to protect the identity of individuals, we were given a profile of a composite of different individuals, but all the profiles were based on actual lived experience. I participated as "Charles", a 17 year-old who had been bounced around in foster care, who had suffered abuse, and ended up on the street. All of this was deeply traumatic, and in order to cope, he had experimented with drugs and had ended up in juvenile detention. As Charles, without any money, ID or connections other than a local shelter, I had to make my way through a day of navigating the system: going to Service Ontario to be told that I couldn't apply for a birth certificate without the \$25 fee. I then went to the ODSP office to be told that I couldn't apply without ID, an address and bank statements. I reached out to a landlord to be told that I couldn't apply for an apartment without proof that I was receiving ODSP. I went to the Employment office to find a line so long that I had to leave in order to get back to the shelter to sign in before 4pm. This is the kind of day that is repeated

over and over again by too many individuals. The Empathy Project is about kinship. It's an effort to invite those who have never experienced homelessness, who have never had to worry about whether a landlord will rent to them or an employer hire them because of their criminal record, who have never struggled with no after no after no visiting social service agencies, to experience what that's like. Kinship asks us to live with empathy - to understand empathy and kinship as a muscle that we can develop and make stronger.

Jesus refuses the symbols of domination—thrones, armies, and crowns—and instead reveals a reign rooted in **kinship**. His rule is not the rule of a monarch looking down upon subjects, but the presence of a brother who walks with his siblings. His authority is relational, not coercive; connective, not controlling. On the cross, he gathers all humanity into God's love, into God's heart, forever. We are gathered not as subjects to be subdued, but as kin to be restored.

In our Gospel passage, we heard one of the criminals say “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Richard Rohr often plays with the word “**remember**” as “**re-member**”—literally *to put back together*. He frequently says that what we call *sin* is really anything that **cuts us off**—from God, from ourselves, from others, or from creation. It “dis-members” us, fragments us. Grace, then, is God's work of **re-membering**: putting the pieces back together.

Our world is full of the opposite of re-membering: there is dis-membering happening all around us. It happens in our own lives,

it happens in the lives of those we love, in friend and in stranger. Pieces have been scattered and lost. Sometimes it is the circumstances of life that do the dis-membering, that leave scattered pieces: grief, violence, loss, shattered dreams, disappointment, guilt, regret. Sometimes our actions, our words, our thoughts create fragmentation and brokenness – in our own lives, and in the lives of others.

Kinship is about this re-membering, about putting back together. It has us recognize the connections between all people, and all things, and it asks us to live from that place of connection.

Jesus was all about kin. He was all about a kinship model of social justice: he was compassionate, charitable and met the immediate needs of those he encountered, *and* he advocated for systemic change. We are all called to this work of kinship. As followers of Jesus, we are all called to participate in bringing God's kin-dom in the world.

In a few moments, we're going to sing a Taizé hymn: Jesus, Remember Me. We'll sing the words of the criminal crucified next to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom". I invite you to focus on the "kin" in "kingdom". As we sing, and pray, may God's grace "re-member" us, so that when we leave that place we can participate with hope and wholeness, to be in the world as kin, so that we can live in the name of kinship, and in Jesus name. Amen.