

**Nov. 20, 2022**

**Christ the Servant, Reston**

**Christ the King (Last Sunday in the church year. Last Sunday at CTS)**

**Colossians 1:11-20**

**Three pastors were comparing notes on their sermon-writing habits. The first one said, “Well, I am guilty of waiting until Friday to write my sermons.” The second one said, “I’ve got you beat. I wait until Saturday night to start mine.” They looked at the third one. He said, “I thought that’s what the prelude was for!” I actually started this sermon two weeks ago. I knew I would have to put more time and thought into it. So, I took a look at the appointed texts of the day with my fingers crossed. “Please, God. Give me a text I can use for my last sermon. Please don’t give me wars, rumors of wars, famines, and plagues like you did last Sunday!” I was very fervent in this prayer.**

**And, behold! God spoke back. God said, “Just for you, Phil, I will assign a passage from the first chapter of Colossians as your epistle. You will be particularly interested in verses 11 and 12.” So, with bated breath I hurried to my New Revised Standard Version, opened to the book of Colossians, and with a wide satisfied smile on my face, read these verses: “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”**

**This passage is the sum and substance of what I want to say to you this morning. It is a blessing. Or let’s imagine it this way. Let’s imagine**

**that you are all holding mugs of coffee straight from our narthex Keurig machine. I'm proposing a toast. Hold up your mugs now. "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from this glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, you has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (You may click your mugs.)**

**I feel so much like St. Paul this morning who was fond of writing letters to his congregations as he was leaving to go someplace else. He would often begin such letters by saying, "I thank God in all my remembrances of you. And he would conclude them by asking that God's grace goes with them. This, of course, is the outline of this my last sermon with you. But the middle parts of Paul's letters would always be filled with a word of advice or encouragement.**

**I'd like to do this. Let's imagine that, as part of your search process, Synod would allow me to put a letter of recommendation in your file to be shared with prospective pastors. This is not allowed, but if it were, here's what I would say: "Dear Prospective Pastor, You will find CTS to be a communion of saints who take their worship and their liturgy very seriously. They actually sing the psalm! Who does that, anymore? They like to study and question doctrine. If they can't apply biblical passages to current events, they are not particularly interested in studying them. They are justice oriented and strive for activism. They take the "servant" portion of their name seriously and are involved with hunger and homelessness issues around Hunters Woods Plaza and Reston. This congregation does not have a history of conflict. They resolve issues quietly and treat their pastor with respect. If you have half the joy I have had in serving this church you would count this as one of your best calls."**

**Of course I am not permitted to put such a letter in your file, but nothing says you can't share this sermon with anyone you want!**

**Once it happened that a Sunday School teacher came upon a little girl sprawled out on the floor with a blank piece of paper and crayons. She was scribbling furiously with a determined look on her face. The teacher asked what she was doing. She said, "I am drawing a picture of God." The teacher said, "Oh, honey! No one knows what God looks like." Without stopping or looking up the girl said, "They will when I'm done."**

**This is what I have tried to do since I've been with you. I've tried to interpret God to you in the way I have experienced and understood God. Sometimes I may have done a better job of that than others. All pastors have their flat sides. I've always felt that spirituality is my own flat side. My friends used to invite me to go on retreats with them to a Cistercian monastery where there is no talking, but only prayer and meditation for days at a time. I think I would go screaming out of such a place after an hour with my hair on fire. That kind of "walk with God" is not for me. But, it doesn't mean that it isn't for you. The next person may lead you in that direction. If so, please be open to the spirit's call in whatever direction it might take place.**

**So, you get one image of God from one pastor. Another image from another. St. Paul had it with that kind of thinking. If you really want to know what God looks like, Paul said, just look at Jesus. Jesus, Paul said, is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." The sum of substance of God was made flesh in the person of Jesus, the Christ. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins.**

**This passage from Colossians is believed to be a fragment of one of the very earliest of Christian hymns. In one of the most beautiful passages of all Paul's writings he sums it up this way: "For in Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross."**

**Years from now you may not remember the picture of God I have drawn for you, but it is my prayer that you will cling to what St. Paul has to say; If you want to know God, know Jesus. And so, I will close once again with Paul's blessing which is my blessing for you: "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."**