

**11/23/14**

**Christ the King, Sunday before advent**

**Matthew 25:31-46**

Craig Barnes, president of Princeton seminary, calls this text one of the bad dog texts. Preachers often use it to scold a congregation, much like scolding a bad dog. A preacher stands up here and says that the world is broken and Jesus is expecting us to fix it. “We stand up here and scold the world for being a mess, and the congregation for allowing this mess to continue. Sometimes the scolding is about the mess the congregation has made of their own lives or the mess they left in the church.<sup>1</sup>” As if you all need constant reminders how little you are doing and how you need to be busier and get to work more and that you should never rest, never take a break, never rest in grace. We preachers stand here and say “bad dog”, put that down, take that outside, or drop it – as I am fond of saying to my dog.

I think a bad dog metaphor is interesting because of my own dog, whose name is Roux. Roux is about 13 years old and is, to put it bluntly, lazy. She’s not always been lazy, she basically acted like

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<sup>1</sup> From “Good Dog, Bad Dog” by M. Craig Barnes Christian Century November 12, 2014, p35

a puppy until she was about 8. She was always up for fetch or a walk, we used to take her hiking all the time and she was constantly active. Even after a hike she would come back to the house and still be up for playing. Now though it is much different. I have learned that she will not walk longer than 4 miles and she will no longer go for a run with me. She sees me put on my running shoes and she no longer stands next to the door excitedly ready to go out, she hides. And that's fine, she's tired. She has worked hard and is a great dog and if she doesn't rest she can be grumpy. But every day I do get her outside for a walk, because she still needs to do some exercise, she comes home and immediately takes a well-deserved nap, she falls asleep on the tile floor in our bathroom – the tile is cold and she has a lot of fur so she is comfortable and she sleeps for as long as my 2 year old will let her. My son and my dog are best friends, they absolutely love each other and have so much fun together. I don't think either one would miss an opportunity to play with the other. But when Roux has done her work, and is given the space to rest, she takes it. It is these moments of grace that give Roux the ability to get back up again and keep playing. She takes them when she can

because she knows there are more walks to take and the 2 year old would like to play fetch.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, which is both the last Sunday after Pentecost and the last Sunday of the Christian Year. It is also the transitional Sunday leading to next Sunday, which is the beginning of our Christian year and the first Sunday in Advent – it begins the Christmas cycle and the new church year. This Sunday is set aside as a celebration of the coming reign of Christ.

I like this Sunday celebration because all of us, no matter how disciplined we are, are already thinking about Christmas. We have already begun thinking about the parties we are having here at Holy Comforter, I know I have a conversation about the upcoming parties at least once a day, we have already started thinking about the food we will eat, and the lights we will go see and all the stuff we will do. The Christmas adds have already started, the displays in windows have already gone up, and QVC, which I am going to admit right here and right now I watch a lot of QVC, even though I've never bought anything – QVC has had their Christmas countdown running for the past month. So the Christmas season is upon us.

But I like this Sunday because it is a brief pause, It gives us a second to breath before the downhill to Christmas. I also love this Sunday because it is a reminder – that we know the end of Jesus’ story, that he is born, lives, and dies as one of us and is raised so that we may have everlasting life and today we may be celebrating the end of the story today – that Christ is King – this day gives us a moment to pause, celebrate, to know that we are loved beyond our wildest dreams by a God that lived, died, and was raised again for us and for our salvation, and it gives us a moment to rest in grace – to have that grace wash over us.

When we think about all that we have to do. All of the injustices and pain in the world, all of the horrible things, all the sadness, or we think about all that we just have to get done. When we try to muster the energy to come here and do the work one more day, when we feel exhausted, when the fading sun and the freezing cold get to us – today and in the season ahead we can rest in the knowledge that we know the end of the story – we know that we are loved and that sometimes, we can rest.

There is a quote from The Talmud that feels particularly apt for today's Scripture texts – the Talmud is a collection of writings in Judaism – which Jesus referenced often, it says:

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

And today is just a day to celebrate and then we have an entire season, the season of Advent when we get to prepare ourselves anew for the coming of Christ. It is meant to be a time of reflection and a time set aside to renew our connection to Christ.

Today, we get to celebrate that Christ is King, we get a day to announce to the world that we know the end of the story, that we have more than a baby Jesus at Christmas, we have a sovereign Christ and we get to sing loudly Joy to the world, the lord is come, let her receive her king – but all of that will come.

In all of our readings this morning we are reminded that today – of all days- we are called to celebrate Christ the King. In the Psalm – “Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us shout for joy to

the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.”

In Ephesians – “God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

And so we know what we celebrate today, that Christ is king and that we are loved beyond our wildest imaginations. And so we can rest in that Grace, we can rest in that hope and Today and in the season to come, look for those moments of grace in your life, look for the moments of grace woven through our liturgy – when we are pardoned, when we sing a hymn that sticks with you, when you take of this sacrament – hold onto those moments of grace and rest into them, lean into them and know that you are loved.

And “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

Yes, we are called to love and care for others, but today and in the coming season of Advent – know that you are loved, rest in God’s grace, so that you can be prepared for the work ahead. When you have a chance to rest, renew, and let Grace wash over you - take it. You are not abandoning the work, you are making sure you are ready to begin the work again. God knows sometimes all of us need it.