

Christ The King Sunday -- Elizabeth Ahern

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

When I was a sophomore in high school, I wrote a persuasive paper on how and why abortion should be called murder. I used my freshly acquired skills in calligraphy (this is the times before beautiful fonts) to make my title page look dramatic, with red and black ink. I also had to present it to the class. It was my first presentation ever and my passion for the topic would make up for my lack of presentation skills, I was sure.

Like my college classmate Bob Munshaw, I studied political science. Last week you heard him tell you that his main political concern growing up was the poor and the oppressed. My single political issue continued to be abortion for at least the next 20 years after high school. I was easily seduced. Why not? It made it very easy for me to choose party affiliation and it felt really good to stand for what is right.

Along the way, I met Mary at Lighthouse Church in Saint Louis. Mary was an exceptional single mother: she loved and cared for her six children and her kids were the best-kept kids around. Looking back to my five years there, I now realize that her kids were the ones that she chose to keep. You see, Mary most likely ended up pregnant as a result of her previous work—prostitution. Many girls in this situation use abortion as birth control, but Mary chose life. Even though I am pro-life, the extent of my contributions were meager—a ride here and there, and conversations once in a while. I am not even sure that I saw Mary as Christ saw her. Others around me did much more to help her in more tangible ways—with babysitting, and helping to organize garage sales when she needed money. It did not quite register with me that Mary and her six children needed more than my assurance that I was standing for what was right. I did not even hold the candidates I helped to elect accountable.

So what's going on during the times of Jeremiah? What's the political situation? The scripture says (23:1), *Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord.* That's is pretty strong language, I would say. Uh-oh, God is mad. But why? If you read the previous 22 chapters of Jeremiah you will see that Jeremiah is a prophet who is standing alone against the prevailing culture of the time. But what could be going on wrong in those good old days, approximately 500 years B.C.?—well, things that God does not like, like forgetting about Him and not going to Him, worshiping other senseless gods (like Baal), selfish acts like forgetting to help the poor and the oppressed and a lot of misinformation. What? You may wonder, even before Facebook there was misinformation? Yes, Jeremiah says that it is so bad, that people had been saying so many lies to themselves and others, and the people had been hearing too so many lies that they could not tell truth from fiction anymore. On top of it, their leaders, including religious leaders and political leaders, had done the same—even easily seducing the people by telling them that everything was just fine the way it was.

What happened next is one of the most devastating events in the history of the Hebrew people. Babylon lays siege, invades, and eventually destroys Jerusalem, taking many captives as slaves and killing many Israelites, including Israel's king and princes. Many escaped to other countries as far as Spain, thus the Jewish diaspora. It must have been an agonizing and painful experience

for Jeremiah, to have been able to see and experience what was happening in his country, and on top of it to be a messenger from God that no one wanted to listen to at the time.

But wait, there's more. Jeremiah also gives a vision for redemption (23:5). *The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

The Gospels have revealed to us what the 'good shepherd' is like through Christ, the good shepherd who is caring and tender with his sheep and who is righteousness itself, one who is compassionate, and heals. Even to the last minute before his death at the crucifixion, we see a Jesus who prays for those who are killing him and says, *Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.* The 'good shepherd' is willing to give his life for his sheep and offers instant redemption to those who seek (23:43): *He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

I am glad that, unlike you and me, Jesus was not and is not so easily seduced by the political situations of his time here on earth. Imagine the times when the leaders scoffed at him, saying, (23:35) *He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!*—or the soldiers mocking him and saying (23:37), *If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!*—or when the criminal said (23:39), *Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!* “Based on your genealogy, you know we think King David was pretty great.” Or, “based on your country of origin—you know that place called heaven?...” What if Jesus had just decided to let his ego reign?: “Well, now that you mention it, I am pretty great; false alarm, not the time to die yet; I am getting down, these people do not deserve it any way; why me, send someone else; or I'm out of here, it's my life.” No, He does not think, like we do, selfish and self-serving thoughts. Though we represent the kingdom of God, we are not perfect. Nevertheless, Christ is perfect. We live in this space of the kingdom both here and not yet—a kingdom represented through us even when we are imperfect.

You may not know that the history of Christ The King, as a day to celebrate in the church, goes back to about 100 years ago. In the early nineteenth hundreds the Christian church in Mexico began to go through a period of persecution that lasted for over two decades. A statue that had been a symbol for the believers in Christ the King was air-bombed by a general and political leader. Many laws were enacted against the church, including prohibitions against owning property, using media to communicate religious messages and assembling to worship. Many believers were sentenced to die while they affirmed their faith in Christ The King (shot as they shouted 'viva Cristo Rey'). The current reconstructed statue of Christ The King on top the mountain at 8300 feet in Guanajuato (geographically, in the heart of the country) stands there as a beacon of faith to the world that Christ is King.

Do you know why America is a beacon of light to the world as a nation? What makes us distinguished among other nations of the world? We are considered the most successful mass (nearly 400 million people), multicultural (an immigrant nation, not a natural homogenous tribe), democratic (for the people, by the people) republic (individual states). And we have a creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created **equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit

of Happiness.” This was included as part of the argument against a tyrannical and oppressive British government in our Declaration of Independence. This is what makes it most possible for you and me and Mary’s six children to live to our full potential.

As amazing as this nation is, it is not perfect and it is not complete—some voices are much louder than others. Equality and justice for all is not yet. At the end, we need a Savior. Christ stands as Savior and clearly as the Lord and King over all. Spiritually, no one else can do this for us. In Christ we have a rich inheritance and we have peace through the cross, because we have been reconciled through the one in whom *all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell* (Colossians 1:19, 20). But not just you, Mary and her kids, and me have been reconciled to God, and are no longer separated from our creator, but all things—all things in heaven and on earth. Christ is Lord of all! Christ is King!