

Reflections on Faith and Life for Christ the King Sunday, November 22, 2020

Today I begin with a prayer written by a Presbyterian pastor: *God of light, I cannot find you in my darkness. I sink into despair instead of standing in faith. I am afraid to hope and too wounded to love. Send your angels and saints to strengthen and build me up. Encourage me with the witness of others who believe when I cannot believe. I claim refuge in your church, the living body of Christ. Amen.*

For many people, this is indeed a time of darkness. COVID runs rampant throughout the world, and in the U.S. there have been more than 11,000,000 cases confirmed, and over 250,000 deaths. Our lives and our economy have been massively disrupted, and this week I received yet another bulletin from our synod Bishop, Laurie Skow-Anderson, begging all congregations NOT to worship in person at least through the end of 2020.

The election has come and gone, yet there's no clear path to a peaceable future in our land. The country is still polarized, with just over 70,000,000 voters on each side. Trust is hard to come by, and relationships in many families and worship groups and workplaces have been damaged or broken. The forecasts of a dark winter could easily give way to a sense of hopelessness.

But, my dear friends—OUR hope doesn't depend of things of this world. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, we know ***that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*** (Rom 5:3-5). And this: ***Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*** (Hebrews 11:1). And once more: ***I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know the hope to which he has called you*** (Ephesians 1:17-18).

The **hope** of Christians isn't like hoping the Packers will beat the Colts this Sunday; or that the pandemic will just go away so we can go back to "normal." Christian **hope** is the sure and certain trust that ***all things work together for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose*** (Romans 8:28). ***God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that all who believe in him may not perish, but have everlasting life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*** (John 3:16-17). ***For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## Reflections for Christ the King, 2020

As I opened with a prayer about darkness, so now I close with another devotional reading on the same topic: *Christians do not deny the darkness. We admit the reality of evil and pain even in this often beautiful world. We are able to be truthful about the forces that lurk because we have been let in on the last act of the play, the final chapter of the story, the outcome of the battle (Disciplines, 2014).*

### **CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!**

(P.S. Remember the miraculous Easter lily at St. John? It was purchased by the Altar Guild for Easter in April, when we were unable to worship together. It was left out in the nave and died but was revived by “water and the Spirit” for our celebration of Easter on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. That blessed plant is still green and growing! Let us “go and do likewise”! (Luke 10:37)

#### Hunter's Blessing

*May the Lord bless you as you enjoy the majesty of his creation, as you observe the wonder of the sky, the beauty of the vegetation, and the glory of his handiwork.*

*May the Lord bless the animals with plentiful food to nourish them and, in turn, your family.*

*May the Lord bless you with crisp, clean, refreshing air, with wind that carries your scent away from your prey.*

*May the Lord bless you to be a good steward of the land, air, water, and game, with an appreciation of the responsibility of dominion over all creation.*

*May your eyes be keen to spot the prey and your hands be steady as you aim your weapon; and may your aim be true.*

*May the Lord bless the game to be plentiful, and may all your experiences create thankfulness toward your God, the creator of all you enjoy. May you return safely to your home. Amen.*