

**11-20-16 "The Right King For This Hour" a Reflection on Jeremiah 23:1-6; Colossians 1:11-20 by Mark Arbisi, Christ Church, KBK**

An online blog author, writing post-election, begins: "I still have hope. Yes, hope that we will always remember that there is love and beauty and tenderness in this world. Hope that we live through the faith that the beauty here is a reflection of divine beauty. Hope that tenderness and kindness will outlast meanness and hatred. Hope that we as a human community will put love above indifference. Hope that justice for all will overcome a 'just us' mentality."

This caught my ear this past week as it echos the core message from both of our lessons this morning. You may have caught this author's use of the words "hope" and "we", as they are repeatedly interwoven, hope and community inseparable. What we're hearing is of course a collective hope, a universal hope, an all-inclusive, communal hope, a hope that flies in sharp contrast to the opposite message that has been pervading our media and our quasi-media as of late; messages steeped in meanness and segregation and hatred. All such messages that shun, and separates, excludes, kicks out, and ridicules religion or skin or gender or sexual persuasion or nationality, in doing so only further fosters yet greater animosity, increased ignorance, stronger fear of the other, fear of the different, fear of people merely in need of shelter, supportive communities, escape from violence, an even chance at a better tomorrow for their children.

And indeed, on this day that we acclaim and profess Christ's singular place of honor and influence over our individual lives and over all the communities we create—This Christ the King Sunday--we are equally shouting back at the world that is torn and heaving with fear that we have hope. Yes, we who have Christ still have hope! We who know the One God, sovereign over all the cosmos are absolutely clear in that knowledge that there is yet profound reason for hope...and with it the expectations that love and beauty and tenderness will once again return, will prevail, will experience a resurgence and a renaissance. Not only is this the core of our ancient and our contemporary faith, it clearly runs much deeper, as if hope in love, beauty and tenderness touches the base of any definition for humanity. It seems even children know this.

In the aftermath of a very vitriolic, divisive, ugly election many parents have found it difficult to draw out any positive aspects of the election to teach their children. But the day after Election Day, Molly Spence Sahebjami tried to do just that. The Seattle mother started a Facebook group called "Letters from Kids About Kindness." The idea started with her own son, a kindergarten student who said he was concerned about things the President-

elect had said about Muslims, because the family has relatives of Iranian descent. So she said to him, "Well maybe we should write a letter to him...Why don't you talk to him about why it's important to be kind?" Her son's letter read: "Dear President-elect, please be a good president. Be kind to all people. Some people in my family are a special religion and they are not bad guys." She emphasized that she wanted the Facebook group to be a "multi-partisan, global grass-roots campaign" that offers parents a chance to turn a divisive election into a "teachable moment." The rules are simple: Letters must be written by children under 18. They should be positive, nonpartisan and kind in tone.

Here is an example by a 6<sup>th</sup> grader from Chicago: "Dear President-Elect, I am writing this to ask you and your family to show love and kindness to all people and to be President to all Americans. Please show kindness to people no matter their race, religion, beliefs, and most importantly, who they are as a person. I have close friends who are gay/lesbian, black and Hispanic. My hockey coach is gay and his partner's children are black. My babysitters are lesbian and they're both expecting a baby in February or March. Our Hispanic friends have an autistic son who needs help. My family is Jewish also. I hope you do what you said in your acceptance speech on Election Day, to be President to all Americans. I hope you pay attention to our messages to make America the best it has ever been. Thank you. Jason Bernstein."

From the mouth of babes, echoed through the generations by the ancients, acclaimed and celebrated by us on this very special day. We are people of tenacious hope. How profound is that?! And with excellent reason. Excellent reason because as we heard from Jeremiah, God has always been involved informing people's hearts, minds and imaginations to be weary of false leaders, and to discern carefully so as to correctly decide who shall lead them. There are, says our prophet of the Lord, "shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture." Shepherds, as you may know, is a common metaphor for kings, for earthly leaders, rulers. And caution is necessary, says the Lord, there are bad shepherds and false shepherd wannabes out there. There are "bad guys" who seeks greater power to rule ruthlessly in ways that fly in the face of God's righteousness and graciousness. "Woe" says the prophet. "Woe" to the demagogues, and "woe" too to those who are supportive of such leaders. "*When people are scattered no good shall come of it,*" insists our Prophet. "*I will attend to your evil doings*" says the Lord.

But all is not just "woe". O no. Our prophet shares not just "woes" but the assurance of God's alternative. The vision of what a true and proper good shepherd looks like. Such is one who "*will bring them back into the fold*" who will unite the people. A good shepherd will not "*drive people out*" of the lands but will insure that all people "*shall be fruitful and multiply.*" All

people. And then God's promise, "*I will raise up over them*" says the Lord, "*shepherds who will shepherd them, and they will not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing.*" These are shepherds who know the Lord and seek God's righteousness in all things. And then even more specifically God's prophet assures the people of a very special shepherd-king, one who is coming, one who in all things will "deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land...and *all* will live in safety...and [this one] will be called "*The Lord is our righteousness.*" Meaning, what is right and proper and just we acknowledge receive from God and God alone and shall look to no other. "*The Lord is our righteousness.*"

In other words, yes, from this ancient voice a hauntingly contemporary word: the divisions people make in choosing their shepherds have real life and death consequences. As a result of their choice in a shepherd the people shall either be united and fruitful or they shall be fearful and scattered from the land. Yes, such decisions can be hard choices, which often become buried in ambiguity and cutting rhetoric; yes, misinformation abounds, all the more when the world is spinning out of control; yes, ignorance of many things alludes busy people with busy lives who have little to no time to choose poorly. Which is especially the case with us Christians, who from the day of our baptisms have a King whose teachings and life-example on radical love, charity and inclusion we can look to daily for guidance and direction and insight and wisdom; as, from day one, we have confessed that *this king*, is the ultimate image of the ultimate shepherd, reigns supreme over our lives, over all our decision-making.

So, that is a heck of a king we have. Yes, we are blessed, as with our king we are people who possess "hope that tenderness and kindness will outlast meanness and hatred." But try selling that to someone who is for whatever reason clueless, or who thinks all gods are the same, or who has dismissed anything religious as a waste of their time. Try convincing someone drowning in a sea of ravenous voices that the king you know is the king they should get to know; indeed, is the king who will save them and their children from sinking beneath the waves. Yea, good luck with that. Yet it is exactly here that our author of the letter to the Colossians enters in. It is exactly this that he is attempting to do, the purpose of his letter. Our author offers a hard-sell to people that were resistant to buying the whole God in Christ thing.

The people of Colossae were beset by many fears and understood their lives as being under assault by countless dark spirits and forces. So what else is new? Our author meets the people where they are, addresses their anxieties by speaking of huge concepts, of how the cosmos was created and how it all holds together by "*the firstborn of creation...in [whom] all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones and dominions or powers or rulers—all things have been created through him*

*and [most significantly] for him.*" Yes, it is a far out there, truly cosmic vision, but it was meant to impress the little gal or guy. It was meant to convince and reassure them of an active God that far transcends their lives and their present-day hardships. Meaning also, the God our author is speaking of is not merely a god of harvest, or a god of fertility, or a god of good fortune—O No! This God, our God, dwarfs such narrow small mindedness—*all things, all things* have been created by and exist for our God. In six verses, "all" is repeated eight times. Our author reveals more than the Colossians ever could have imagined. And, that in the One who reveals this God—namely, Jesus the Christ of Nazareth—the *very* image of the invisible God *is* seen, the *very* nature of the fullness of God *is* revealed. All they have to do is pay attention. So yes, this Christ fellow appears an excellent soul to get to know—who knows, he might even lift the people from their doldrums by filling them with the love of Christ that called all things in heaven and on earth together.

So yes, assuming you already knew all this, then in the least, a very adequate prelude to our Advent-Christmas season; to say nothing of receiving more than adequately preparation for a week of giving thanks. Also as you know all too well, as the path the Christ light illuminates is a challenging one, we have a choice today and always: Will we follow the shepherd acclaimed in scripture and revealed in the life, ministry, death and continued Spirit of Jesus the Christ, or another? Will we freeze in the face of fear, surrender to difficult days, resign our very lives to the earthly powers amassed by false shepherds or...or will we behold the wisdom of God in God's word to us? Will we be moved to stand up and stand out and stand as proud witnesses of our faith? Our faith that holds a tenacious hope in its heart; our faith that lives to reinforce the unity of God's creation; our faith, grounded on the wisdom of God, and the love of Christ that in gathering us together as one people overcomes all that divides people—overcomes the darkness of the world and its misguided, bad guy shepherds.

Friends, our King is prepared to heal the world, our nation, our hearts and the hearts of those closest to us that believe and act very different from us, right now. Today. Do yet have hope that tenderness and kindness will outlast meanness and hatred? Will you share that hope? We will, the people God addresses today, follow Christ our king or another? The days ahead are sure to reveal our decision...to say nothing of the king that will shepherd us. Do we have the right king for the facing of this hour, or another?

Amen