

Christ the King Sunday

Nov. 18, 2018 Rev. Shelagh MacKinnon

You may remember this as Christ the King Sunday but for many years its been The Reign of Christ Sunday.

But it's the New Year's Eve of the Christian Year. I wasn't here last year to know if you set Resolutions – I can get the scales out if that would help you check.- I myself made three resolutions and I have kept two of them: I have attended a Hockey game and seen a baseball game but have not gone to Lucia de Lammermoor. So I'm batting two out of three. Yes, I avoid those personal improvement resolutions!

Alpha and Omega: The first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet and the image used in the Revelation of St. John. There are so many engaging images of Jesus:

The incarnation

The beloved One

Where many people meet the Sacred, through God in a human body

With a moral code: "Love God, your neighbour, yourself."

Jesus taught in Parables, those memorable stories that we are invited to throw down beside the story of the life we are living. This allows us to measure our lives by His moral code. How are we doing?

This is the Sunday and if Christ was our patron saint, which he isn't, this day at the end of the Christian year might be a feast day.

Hence the second anthem: "Jesus Christ The apple tree" I requested that myself. This is for the mystics in our midst! Christ as a tree, a deeply meditative image passed down through the generations, honours that we image the universal Christ differently.

I hope that by now you are used to my coffee habit. I usually bring a mug or a thermos mug with me everywhere, whereas my Dad drank his after-dinner coffee from a demitasse -yes, a teeny, tiny cup is for coffee!

They said it tasted better in a lovely cup and perhaps it is something you have felt - the container makes a difference. That's up to a point because, be it stainless steel or bone china, it is just the container. But still, rancid coffee is undrinkable no matter what the container!!

Jesus talked about that when he used the images of patches and wineskins, maybe you remember the story...

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (Matthew 9:16. M17)

That is a story about the container.

Last week, I heard about a different container for the message of the Beloved, the message of 'love God, love neighbour and love self '... and I have asked Paul Jenkins this morning to tell you what he told me.

Paul Jenkins:

An Tobar Nua

I wanted to briefly talk about an experience that Jean and I had in Ireland during a recent trip. It led me to immediately think of First Met, redevelopment, doing church differently, outreach and social enterprise, all of which have been discussed a lot in the past year.

We spent several days in Galway on the west coast of Ireland (highly recommended city to visit if you are looking for interesting overseas destinations). We were wondering around the canals of the city, looking for some lunch and stumbled into a cafe with the interesting name of "An Tobar Nua" (picture). It means "The New Well".

It seemed quite nice, sitting beside the water, but as time went on, I noticed the high number of younger people, clustered in groups and various references to counselling, Christianity, social justice, etc.

We started up a conversation with the waiter and found out that this cafe is a very unique enterprise involving Catholics, non-Catholics, other faiths and no faiths, that is focused on working together to reach out to younger people, while including the community at large.

We came away with a feeling of home, welcome and community spirit, and I couldn't help wondering if this could be something First Met could do in some form in the future.

The organization was founded by two Americans in 1993 who felt called to this ministry, left their established careers and succeeded in establishing the café in Galway, although it is now mostly under Irish leadership.

It is Christ centred and while it is definitely evangelical in approach, it doesn't pound religious teachings into people's heads. What I saw rang true in terms of welcoming everyone, helping others in need and reaching out to the community.

The ministry has grown to include the café, a bookstore, youth outreach programs, a scripture school and a counselling centre. They have also expanded some of their services beyond Galway.

I think this enterprise succeeded because it identified a real need in that time and place: Irish sectarian strife, lost youth, lots of youth, several local schools without any cafeterias, etc.

I wouldn't suggest that their model would work at First Met. But is there a model that would? It doesn't take a lot of imagination to identify some of the major issues in our location and some possibilities to consider. It seems to me that we are at a point in our church's life where some form of social activity or enterprise might be just right.

Food for thought.

Thanks Paul. A coffee shop may be as different from this beautiful sanctuary as this thermos is from my Dad's bone china. But they are, when it comes down to it, both containers, only containers for the important message inside.

Christ the King Sunday is considered the New Year's Eve of the Christian year, a chance to look back at where we have been as individuals and communities of faith. We are here to hold and to pour out that wonderful message - the question for the year ahead may well be 'how many ways can we imagine being a church?'

I have been asking people where they experience the Holy this week.

We know people find God in humanity, that there is a little bit of all of us in each of us. So where, and how, do they celebrate the Alpha and Omega? We hear of churches opening soup venues, where 'being church' is sharing lentil soup and conversation.

A storefront? We are a store front when people see our message board advertising a program offered by Wally Lazaruk while they are going by, or walking by, and then come in for that spiritual resource.

Many people told me they experience the Holy in Nature. One woman said to me that she imagined the worst thing about being in jail would be never being able to go for a walk in the outdoors.

What about this? We know that people relate to the Sacred in nature - what if you walked up to a beautiful park and there was a sign that said, "Welcome to St Swythun's church. As you wander these trails, may you feel the blessing of God, our Creator, Jesus, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. And then maybe Thou shalt take nothing but pictures. Thou shalt leave nothing but footprints."

The Christ, our beloved one, can never be limited to what any one community envisions. Whether that be a community defined by time or geography or culture.

Do we house this life saving message in new ways? Of course!!

Do we know what it will all look like? No, but the One we follow offers us Grace and Peace in the unfolding.