

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"An Audience of One"  
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The end of another church year has come. And on this, the last Sunday of the Church year, we celebrate what used to be called Christ the King Sunday. Currently it is called the Reign of Christ Sunday, which inclusivizes the term and sets us thinking about what Christ wants us to do here and now, perhaps to the detriment of reflecting on the kingship of Jesus Christ, which is to be the focus for today.

Many of us have public forums for which we are responsible: teachers, professors, medical professionals, artists, musicians, retail sales, writers, students and some simply have a large family stage. We perform regularly in the midst of our colleagues, peers, clients, patients, students and audiences, large and small. Now there are perhaps many more of us who do not have a number of people as our audience, perhaps just one or two who rely upon us in a special and unique way. Some of you shun the limelight. It would be your last desire in life to be on the centre stage in any way. Nevertheless, all of us have someone who listens to us, cares for us, gives us feedback, negative and positive, lives with us, loves us in some way. None of us live a completely separate, isolated life. We are interconnected and interdependent.

In this social existence that we live, some of us thrive on that interaction. Others much prefer the quiet of time alone. But all of us have an audience of some kind. That does not mean that we are dramatic, or persuasive, or comedians, although some of us are, we can't help it. It just comes out. What we are comes out, and therefore we are known.

But there is a knowing deeper than any other. There is God's knowledge of us, whoever we are, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. This knowledge is not neutral. God is for us in Jesus Christ. God wants us our best, the Scripture tells us over and over. But because of sin, we try to hide, from God and from one another.

Today is a day in the church calendar when we say, "Don't hide any longer." Be fully known by God, and get to know God more fully. Because in the end there is only one audience that counts, an audience of One. That One is

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, particularly made known to us in Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah describes him as the Good Shepherd, the One who both knows and cares more than any human pastor or leader or caregiver. When the spiritual leaders of Israel had gone astray, Jeremiah reminds God's people that God himself looks after the children of the covenant better than any flawed leader, better than any clergy or priest, better than any prophet. He knows justice, real right and wrong, safety and salvation from sin better than any human being.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, wrote a song about this God whose tender mercies are like the light of dawn coming to those sitting in the shadow of death. We don't know if Zechariah wrote the song while he was mute or later, but he expressed his faith and praise to God. God's tender mercies come and so Zechariah encourages us to open our eyes and our ears to the One who wants to continue showing us faithfulness, justice, hope and true peace. When no one else understands what we are going through, Jesus does. When no one else can reach out to the depths of our need, Jesus can. When we sense we have nowhere else to go, we can go to the One who truly understands.

Jesus Himself is the Creator, Colossians tells us. He made it happen, all of creation in the mystery of the Trinity in the far recesses of time. And he makes it hold together, not just in the gaps of our scientific knowledge, which increases daily. He makes our relationships hold together, he makes the physical universe hold together, he makes sense of our lives in the confusion and darkness of the days in which we live.

Lest we miss the power of these truths, he wants us to picture ourselves in our work environment, or our schools, or our homes, or wherever we are, with Him there with us. He is there, by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to know how vital his love is to our existence, his faithfulness to us staying faithful to Him, his peace giving us peace inside. We can have hope because He cares.

But He doesn't force us to acknowledge his presence, nor even to yield our lives to Him or even our thinking. He constantly puts options before us. We don't have to choose the light, if we prefer darkness. We don't have to

choose the warmth of his love and forgiveness, if we choose bitterness, unforgiveness and seek to hide.

This is the stark comparison we have from the Gospel reading where Jesus is on the Cross for our sins. Others, many others were around him, including those who were also on crosses, who knew something of what he was going through. Their brief interactions are recorded so that we can know how they related to Jesus just before they all died. The soldiers were mocking him and the illogical combination of a Saviour and a man humiliated and tortured to death. One of those on the cross dared to tell him what to do. He said if Jesus were really who said he was, he should get down from there and rescue the criminals around him. But since he was not doing that, he could not be who he said he was.

And some of us dare to tell the Lord what he should and should not be doing around the world today, and here in St. John's and in our province. Some of us tell Jesus what he should be doing, if he really was who he says he is. Maybe we don't say it to his face. We say it with our actions, with our daily living, with the boldness of looking God in the face and intimating that we know better.

But many of us also know our own condition, our own need, the limitations of our perspectives, the fact that this Jesus has something bigger going on, than just this one moment in time. Many of us, like the other criminal, look at ourselves and note that whether or not we deserve what we are going through, this Jesus has come with a mission to love the lost, to care for the broken hearted, to bring sanity into the confusion of the world, in the form of giving rather than taking.

We simply say to the Lord, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And there is much said in that little phrase. It underlines the knowledge of Jesus, and asking for relationship based not on demands, but on mercy. It agrees with the spirit of Jesus and notes that there is more to life than this life. It establishes belief and trust in the power of what Jesus has to offer. It does not suggest that Jesus will forget, but that even in a relationship with him for a few hours, a power trust has been established based on Jesus' grace and power.

And so we too have the choice before us in our lives. Will we live like the one criminal or the other? Will we be telling Jesus what He should be doing? Or will we be inviting Jesus to bring his kingdom and kindness into our lives?

The Advent/Christmas season is upon us officially next Sunday, but I'm sure you've already heard the music somewhere, in the mall, in your home, on the radio. This particular season with its unusual incarnation in North America has become something far removed from the celebration of the ancients. The material overdrive and spiritual gutting of the holiday season with the removal of references to the birth of Jesus Christ and many other losses make this a difficult season for many. I hope you will take some time to choose to take some time of quiet in the midst of the busy-ness.

In conclusion, we might say, "all the world is a stage..." and we do perform our duties before others. Let's try to remember the One who counts.

Let us pray.