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CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

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Colossians 1:11-20

November 25, 2007

Reign of Christ Sunday

“Now Let Me Be the Lover”

Did you know that this is the last Sunday of the Christian calendar? Next week we start a brand new year with the first Sunday of Advent. This Sunday is known traditionally as Christ the King Sunday. These days, it's usually called The Reign of Christ. Whatever we call it, the meaning is subversive. Most of us associate kingship with absolute authority and the power to do pretty much anything you want to do with your subjects. But when the author of Colossians prays that we “be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power”, he's referring to quite a different kind of power (Colossians 1:11).

The “glorious power” is power as exercised by the Christ. There's a story told by Thich Nhat Hahn, the Buddhist priest, about the Buddha and Christ getting together for a visit. Buddha asks for permission to serve Christ tea, but Christ insists on serving tea to the Buddha. I'm sure they worked it out, and I'm sure one or the other graciously received the gift of the other. The point is that the “glorious power” is the power of love and humility that issues in the desire to be of service. There really are only two forms of power: power as domination and power as love. Every religious tradition teaches that the spiritual

journey from the one form of power to the other. The writer of Colossians says it this way: “God has rescued us from the powers of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son...”(vs13).

The power of darkness is power exercised as domination, whether by kings and queens, corporate bullies, deviant priests, abusive men, manipulative women, or by bullies of all stripes and colours. The other reading for this Sunday is always the story of the crucifixion, depicting the *apparent* triumph of the powers of darkness over the power of love. I say “apparent” because the claim at the heart of the Christian faith is that this is precisely the event that unmasked the powers – to use theologian ,Walter Wink's, phrase. This gruesome execution was the best that the domination system could throw at the subversive love of Christ – and it came up hopelessly short. It only served to reveal the dirty little secret – that those who dwell in the kingdom of darkness serve the end of violence. They cannot tolerate love because love topples kingdoms based in domination.

The powers of domination are alive and well within each one of us. Pretty much our entire culture, along with the world governance system,

currently functions from a place of darkness. This is because we live in a state of separation from God. In this state of separation, we function from a place within that author Bill McKibben calls “hyper-individualism”. We think and act as though we exist disconnected not only from each other, but also from the earth, and from the Divine Source. From this mindset of disconnection, we live in a world in which the only way forward is competition for scarce resources, and being “on guard” as our national anthem puts it – both as nations and as individuals. The enemy lurks at every turn. We end up committing acts of violence on all levels - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

To be “redeemed”, using the language of the writer, is to overcome this false sense of disconnection. This, in short, is the spiritual journey – the sacred transfer from the powers of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son – the Kingdom of the Christ. You may have noticed that Jesus, as Sovereign One, committed no act of violence at any time. The closest he came was when he overturned tables in the temple, an act of protest against the religious establishment that hurt no person. His mission was to help us to dwell within an alternative kingdom, what he called the kingdom of God. This is an inner knowing that we have been set free from the illusion of isolation and can choose to act from a place of love.

I suggest in my book dropping the “g” and talking about the kin-dom

of God. This captures the spiritual truth that there is no disconnection anywhere in the universe. We are kin with God, with each other and with all creation. To “share in the inheritance of the saints *in the light*” (vs.12) is to understand this radical interconnectedness. Those who are “in the light”, are not just those that have left this world. They are the enlightened ones, those who have come to this awareness. The reason I like the metaphor of the Holy One when referring to God is because I will often in my own mind put the emphasis on the second word – One. The Holy *One, or Holy Oneness* is the sacred unity; God in us, Us in God, creation in us, us in creation; God in creation; creation in God. This is our inheritance, to know this divine kinship for ourselves: to overcome the illusion of radical disconnection and to be in the light of radical connectedness.

Leonard Cohen is a national treasure. He wrote a song called *You Have Loved Enough*. It’s a song that conveys that he has been transferred from the powers of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son – the fact that he’s Jewish matters not a whit. In the song he arrives at a deep gratitude that the Holy One kept him from any kind of belief system until he could learn the wisdom lesson that our actions are intended to flow from the heart of the Holy One, through us – those actions and beliefs that originate from our identity as disconnected beings are inevitably tainted with fear.

Here are a few lines from the song that expresses his awareness:

“ I am not the one who loves;
it’s Love that seizes me.

When hatred with his
package comes, you forbid
delivery”

And when the hunger for Your
touch rises from the Hunger,

You whisper “you have
loved enough, now let Me be the
lover.”

Using Christian language, the author of Colossians attempts to describe the same ineffable mystery. The language is foreign to our ears because we don’t understand cosmology in the 21st century. Cosmology can be defined as the big story we tell ourselves about ultimate reality. Modernism has given us many gifts, but it stripped us of the Big Sacred Story. So, let’s reacquaint ourselves with some of this 1st century cosmology: the author of Colossians says that the Christ is the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation” (v.15), Christ is the Creator of all things visible and invisible (v.16). “Everything, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, were created through him and for him” (v.16). He “holds all things together” (v.17). And finally, he was raised from the dead so that all powers would know that he is “first place in all things” (v.18). All of this complex cosmology can be boiled down to the

last phrase. He is establishing that the love of the Christ already *is* the first principle; this love created the universe; the love of Christ already *is* the truth, already *is* the way. Our job is to wake up, over and over again, until we have put “first things first”.

Leonard Cohen awakens to the truth that his hunger for the intimacy of another human being arises from the Hunger (capital H) – that is, the Hunger for intimacy with the divine. *Then*, and only then, the Holy One is able to get the message through to him. She whispers to him: “You” – meaning his disconnected self – “have loved too much, now let Me be the lover.” In other words, step aside for just a moment, so that the love you are seeking to give and receive can flow from the Love that is the source of your yearning. Let the One who is first place in all things – the Holy Oneness - take the helm.

So many romantic affairs occur because this yearning for intimacy with the Holy One is confused with the one who triggered this yearning. I was listening to a song on my I Pod last week. A truly heartbreaking song about a young man who is high on drugs and spots a woman on the street with another man, but who smiles at him as they pass. He is smitten. Her beauty seems otherworldly. He falls in love with her in an absolute fashion, knowing that he will never be with her. The song is excruciatingly beautiful and poignant, precisely because his longing for a Transcendent Love, for his first love, was awakened. His love

for her had risen from his hunger for Love in Absolute form. Chances are that if he could have been with her, he would have very quickly begun to notice her flaws and blemishes. His disenchantment would have been acute. There is so much beauty in the world, in people and in creation, because God is so beautiful. All life, all love, all beauty, all goodness, all truth, all human longing is sacramental. It's all a visible manifestation of the invisible love of Christ who is the First Principle. But these visible manifestations are icons; we should look through them on to the heart of the Holy One. Don't expect your spouse or your boyfriend, or your painting or your book or the piece of music you wrote, to fulfill the longing in your heart for the Oneness from whom all these blessings flow. It is too much for any single creature to bear. We are all beautiful, but partial, intimations of the Holy One with whom our hearts long to realize our unity. Only when we love the Absolute are we able to truly love the partial. This is why Jesus concurs with the heart of the Jewish faith that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind – *then* love our neighbour as our self.

The author of Colossians says that Christ was the one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). This is the radical edge of Christian spirituality – the claim that Love itself, the First Principle, took on flesh in order to help us make this journey is from the powers of darkness to the kingdom of the Beloved Son. The one we call the Christ experienced

life in all its glory and agony – the beauty and the violence, the dignity and the disaster of humanity, the goodness and the evil, and had only compassion – compassion for our slow and halting attempts to come home to the heart of God. On the cross, his outstretched arms embraced each and every one of us, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing”. It is this unfailing love that draws us, that encompasses us, and that reconciles us to the very heart of God.

To confess that the Christ reigns in our life is to follow our yearnings back to the Source and surrender our small and fearful selves to the Love that is our alpha and our omega, our beginning and our end. It is to give the Christ the rightful status of being “first place in all things”.