

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 24, 2013

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The core of our faith is the cross. Yet the cross would mean little apart from Jesus' passion for the poor and marginalized and compassionate love for all. Jesus is King reigning from a shame intended, rough wooden cross. He forgives his executioners and welcomes a fellow death row prisoner to walk with him into the coming kingdom. Soon they will cross over together into life beyond death where there will be no more senseless violence, no more injustice, no more hunger, no more sorrow, no more despair.

What a curious King we have. Not one who wields power and will share it with us if we follow his rules, as do the powerful of our day—presidents, CEOs, and law makers. Here is a King who gives away power. Overcoming with and for the sake of love and life giving justice.

If we're honest, we find it challenging to follow the lead of our King. Jesus resisted the urge to cling. He learned to give it away with wisdom. Not even a gentle manipulation of the masses.

From the cross Jesus then cries, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit," and breaths his last. Of course, that had been his cry all along. When he entrusted himself into the care of God, he didn't need to care first for his own survival but could trust God for "all these things."

Our Colossians passage also has a great deal to say about the universal reign of Christ. "He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have release, forgiveness of sins." In the Spirit of Christ all things were created, in him all things hold together, In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds weigh in on the reign of Christ. "One Lord, begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father." In other words, Jesus and God are not the same person—they are distinct and you can talk about one without talking about the other—Christian theology has for a long time spoken of them as "of the same substance"—with the difference that Jesus was conceived fully human and fully divine.

Now I think it is important to mention that if we press too much the details of the Trinity, we lose the point of the Trinity. Language about God points us to mystery—to awe and wonder. Our understanding of God should never try to address all of our questions, but it can help us think about who it is who holds all things together.

The language of faith is the language of mystery. Who is God? We see God in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The Nicene Creed goes on with the words of faith, "Through him all things were made, For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary and was made man." God in flesh, Emmanuel, a God human—again, this is the language of mystery. It can deeply stir within us faith that our humanity is beloved of God. God moved in human nature to reveal the nature of love, the nature of God, the nature of peace. This is good news!

This is why faith can never be head knowledge for the sake of head knowledge. Faith teaches us about who we are and that we are made and live in the image of God. Faith is not a hoop we jump through to be on good terms with God. Right belief is not our hope for salvation—no, that hope comes from God alone. Faith helps us to look into the mirror and see our incompleteness and yet we the beloved of God. We are children of God, led by the Spirit who teaches us through the example and love of this King—Jesus. Faith leads us into union with God. To look at the bread in our hands and see the hands

and flesh of our Lord who shows us that humanity and Divinity are not mutually exclusive.

If we begin splitting hairs, parsing with great detail the language of faith, we lose the creative edge of faith.

That creative edge is that we trust this God who gives life and receives it back again. We don't have to get everything right along the way. It's more a relationship than it is a school lesson. Relationships require that we show up, listen, speak, relate. School lessons require that we understand and memorize and get the questions right. It's possible to get the right answers and still miss the whole point! In faith we learn to trust and love as God has loved us. We might get all the answers wrong and still pass the class because we got the message. The message is love, acceptance, and friendship. We are the beloved of God. Baptism reveals God's unconditional regard and love for a new baby who is powerless to believe the right things, to say and do the right things. For that matter, isn't that true of all of us? We are here. Our being is a gift of God.

Our relating together in this community of faith is a gift of God. Unity. Mercy. Relationships. Compassion. Peace. It's all perfect freedom bestowed freely without reservation. That's good news.

Thanks be to God. Thanks be to Christ our King. Amen.