

Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Colossians 1:11-20

*My sister sent me this story.....It is called, The Whale... A female humpback whale who had become entangled in a spider's web of crab traps and lines near San Francisco, was weighted down by hundreds of pounds of traps that caused her to struggle to stay afloat. She also had hundreds of yards of line rope wrapped around her body, her tail, her torso, a line tugging in her mouth.*

*A fisherman spotted her just east of the Farallon Islands (outside the Golden Gate) and radioed an environmental group for help. Within a few hours, the rescue team arrived and determined that she was so badly off, the only way to save her was to dive in and untangle her. They worked for hours with curved knives and eventually freed her.*

*When she was free, the divers say she swam in what seemed like joyous circles. Then she did something incredible. She came back to each and every diver, one at a time, and nudged them, pushed them gently around as she was thanking them. Some said it was the most beautiful experience of their lives. The guy who cut the rope out of her mouth said her eyes were following him the whole time, and he will never be the same.*

*May you, and all those you love, be so blessed and fortunate to be surrounded by people who will help you get untangled from the things that are binding you. And, may you always know the joy of giving and receiving gratitude.*

Let us be in prayer: With thanksgiving, O God, I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

This happens to be the very last Sunday in our church year...can you believe that NEXT Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent? This last Sunday of our church year, is sometimes called "Christ the King" Sunday. But this is the ironic and all the more beautiful thing about "Christ the King".... Jesus made a spoof of triumphalism. He mocked kingship...on the cover of the bulletin I chose this wonderful image by the Japanese artist, Watanabe, who depicts Jesus here as a humble shepherd....closely holding a lamb....not an armadillo, as Esther suggested.

Jesus demonstrated that rather than the need for a royal demeanor surrounded by military might and the hierarchy of power...Jesus showed us a different kind of strength....but look how powerful it was! Drawn from a relationship with God...it was the power of infinite and inclusive love for those around him, for those of different

religions, those in poverty, for women and children, for saints and sinners....even for prostitutes and tax collectors. This powerful love reached into the very souls of those around him...and they were transformed.

William Barclay describes that when there was a battle in the ancient world, it was sometimes the custom to "transfer" a whole population from a defeated country to the conqueror's land. Likewise, he says that with the advent of Christianity, the people were invited to "transfer" their whole existence into a new way of being...like being in a new place.

Isabel Wilkerson, the author of the book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, was just interviewed on *On Being*. She says that when there was this great 3-generation migration of African Americans from the south to the north in our country, looking for work and to make a better life...they tried to take on the identity of the new place.

I think when we embrace these words of scripture about what it means to be a Christian, it might be good to "move there." If we move into Christianity, then we would strive to take on the identity of that place...take on the love, compassion, forgiveness, and challenge to reach out to those who suffer... to dwell in this fullness of God.

I have to admit that for much of my spiritual life, it has been God, that mystery of spirit and love with whom I pray. Jesus, has been mostly human, for me. Even as my life has been deeply influenced by his extraordinary healing powers, and his endless reaching across boundaries and cultural norms to demonstrate God's inclusive and infinite love. Jesus spoke "truth to power" like no other...and his actions have inspired such peacemakers as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and countless others even today. I have even created many block prints portraying Jesus' life and teachings. I love this guy! And I believe that it has been through Jesus that I have come to understand God, better. But what about the idea of Jesus *as* God....Jesus, as the Christ?

Who is Christ? The name, Christ: in Greek, *Christos*, means *anointed*, and it means *Messiah* in Hebrew. Anointed, blessed with sacred oil was a custom practiced with kings! The name Christ would seem to make Jesus kingly, even as we just said that Jesus made a mockery of any reference to kingship.

Here comes this text for today. The Gnostics of this time when Paul or someone in his day, wrote this letter to the Colossians, also questioned the Divinity of Jesus and believed that God was beyond becoming part of this physical world.

But this letter opens up the notion of God at work IN Jesus. Perhaps this is what is the Christ. This Holiness at work...this Sacred blessing is what is anointed in

Jesus...and in us. And in this Universal Christ of God's infinite love, all things can be held together. There is room for all, even the brokenness of the world because God's healing grace *is* able to enter into our physical existence.

Jesus held God in his consciousness...more clearly than perhaps, others. But we too, can to some degrees hold this Spirit within us. The Christ in us is why we can call ourselves, Christians!

In my very progressive interpretation, this Holiness ---can also be experienced in other faiths as well...for Christ is wherever love, compassion, forgiveness, devotion and beauty...reside....even if it may be called by other names...it is in the way we live God's love with one another that matters.

But no one said that this place of faith is easy...we struggle to hold all things together in the deep love of an infinite God. We certainly are at a time of needing to be held together...in love right now. More than ever, we need to stand up for all our brothers and sisters no matter who they are, what their race or nationality or sexual identity. For in Christ, all things are held together...

It may be a struggle....but I cannot imagine facing our world from any other vantage point. I love facing this world of ours....through an inclusive, forgiving and deeply seated love at the root of all life....this God in Jesus...this Christ...is what engages me. The letter says to have endurance, to be patient, to be strong with the affirmation of God with us....giving thanks...joyfully giving thanks for this gift of faith and hope.

That it is Christ, God in humanity, in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created...things visible and invisible...beyond all dominions or rulers or powers...or kings or presidents...it is before all things and beyond all things....and it gives us the courage to act for the well-being of others.

We revealed to each other at our Centering Prayer group yesterday, that we felt that now was the time to step up our support and our prayers for those who may feel frightened by current racist conversation... to support interfaith understanding, to work beside others to welcome the immigrants who enrich our country, to stand with people of color of all ages, people of other faiths and sexual orientations. This is how Jesus demonstrated the Love of God in his time...to cross those boundaries and reach out with the affirmation of God's infinite love for all.

More than ever, we must stand for the stewardship of our earth, not letting our country slip backward from goals to prevent further climate change...this is Biblical, to

cherish and protect our God-given earth for the benefit of all who share her resources.

Now is the time to engage even more fully with our church who reaches out in so many ways...locally and nationally and internationally.... Our gifts extend our love and our prayers as well.

Isabel Wilkerson said... that there are some things we cannot ignore. She said that our country is like an old house. When you go to renovate it, you cannot ignore the cracks...you might throw a rug over them, but they will come back and need attention in the future.

Our country is in need of attention. There are attitudes that are harmful to the well-being of our neighbors and our land and if we ignore them, perhaps as we have been doing for a long time now, if we ignore them they will need to be attended to later. So let us reaffirm our faith that in Christ, God with us, all things are held together as we express our love and compassion for the diversity of this great nation....and let us give thanks for this work that we do together.

Perhaps like the whale, we need a little nudging as we show our gratitude for one another!

Amen.