

“Christ the King”
 Anna Pinckney Straight
 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia
 November 25, 2018

John 18: 33 – 37

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

This time of year.

This time of year is a time known for its contradictions.

Thanksgiving, a day of abundance and tables filled with more than we can possibly eat.

Followed by Black Friday, as one of my friends on Facebook said,

“Black Friday, the day we trample each other for sales one day after being thankful for what we already have.”¹

Or, as a friend tweeted a few days ago,

“Listen, I agree, wholeheartedly, but please don't tweet at me to shop less this year... from your iPad.”²

It is almost the season of Advent, a time of repentance and contemplation, in which most of us will be busily getting ready for Christmas: shopping, decorating, holiday parties, making lists, and trying to remember what we have forgotten to do.

And Christmas, this time of year when we are supposed to be filled with the joy of family togetherness, but when, in reality there are many, many in our midst who are alone. Struggling. Grieving. Not convinced that this is the most wonderful time of the year.

This Sunday is the end of the liturgical year.

Black Friday:
 Because only in America,
 people trample others for
 sales exactly one day after
 being thankful for what
 they already have.



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Landon Whitsitt @LandonWhitsitt

21 Nov

Listen, I agree, wholeheartedly, but please **don't** tweet at me to shop less this year...from your iPad.

Expand

The clock re-starts next Sunday when we begin Advent—
anticipating celebrating Jesus' arrival by remembering that he promised to come again.

It is a contradiction time of year.

And today. Christ the King Sunday.

This is a day that is based on the biggest contradiction our faith has to offer,
that God continually comes to us in ways we don't anticipate,
to people we don't expect,
to lead us in directions that are the opposite of where we wanted to go.

Jesus saves not by command but by invitation,
and being saved means being called to serve.

A King who opposes violence
by refusing to engage in it.

Christ is the King. No crown or wealth or law-making ability.
But an entourage, a keen insight, and the truth.
Not just the teaching of truth, but truth itself.

A King who is all powerful
because he shares power, with open hands.

A King who doesn't seek, want, or need people to glorify him,
but who continually points to someone else, to God.

This time of year is a time of contradictions.

And maybe instead of trying to reconcile them,
we should embrace them.

Because Jesus did.
And was.
And Is.

Delores Williams, a Womanist Theologian³ and one of my professors in seminary, remembers from her childhood⁴:

Sunday mornings when the minister shouted out: "Who is Jesus?" The choir responded in voices loud and strong: "King of kings and Lord Almighty!" Then, little Miss Huff, in a voice so fragile

³ <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=445>

"Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," by Delores S. Williams, *Christianity and Crisis* March 2, 1987
Retrieved November 24, 2012.

⁴ From a sermon preached by Barbara Lundblad, also a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

<http://odysseynetworks.org/news/onscripture-the-bible-john-18-33-37>

"A Different Kind of King: John 18:33-37," by Barbara K. Lundblad, Retrieved Friday, November 23, 2012

and soft you could hardly hear, would sing her own answer, “Poor little Mary’s boy.” Back and forth they sang – KING OF KINGS – Poor little Mary’s boy. Delores [Professor Williams] said, “It was the Black church doing theology.” Who is Jesus? “King of Kings” cannot be the answer without seeing “poor little Mary’s boy.”

The two aspects of Jesus cannot be reconciled and made compatible,
they are distinct and, yet, together,
for Christianity to be that which transforms us from Children of God into Disciples of Jesus Christ.

My colleague Andrew Foster Connors suggests that we all need to struggle
with the contradictions posed to each of us by Jesus as King.

He tells the story of when he lived in Atlanta, and a group decided to address the contradiction of a crucified King on the steps of Georgia’s state capitol building⁵:

Standing out there beneath Georgia’s monuments to power [he says,], I listened to a group of 8 people who had spent the previous evening on the streets of Atlanta. They had been holding vigil with the homeless – a foolish thing to do. “It started raining at midnight,” a spokesperson from the group said. They looked for shelter, but everywhere they went, already someone was sleeping there. It was about 2 am and they were all getting wet and miserable. They passed a church with its lights on. There was an overhang so they approached the entrance and huddled together while they tried to figure out if the church was open. A security guard came out to meet them. ‘Is the church open?’ they asked. ‘Yes, it’s open,’ the security guard said. ‘They’re having a twenty-four hour prayer vigil.’ ‘Great,’ the group’s leader said, ‘we’re having a vigil, too.’ Then one of the group members added that they were actually looking for a warm place to get out of the rain. The security guard took two steps back and said to them, ‘I’m sorry, you can’t come in here. I’ve been hired to keep people like you out.’ They moved on until they came to a small covered area that housed a trash dumpster just outside of a pizza restaurant. A homeless man invited the group in – invited all 8 of them in. They crowded together, wet and hungry as the man offered what was left of half a pizza foraged from the trash.

“Who would have thought,” one person commented that night on the steps of the Georgia capitol building, “that of all places, we would have found Jesus sleeping behind that dumpster, inviting us out of the rain to break bread with us.”

Who would have thought?

Jesus would have thought. Jesus, the king who was being questioned by Pilate,
Jesus would have thought.

Jesus, who spoke to the woman at the well.

Who told the story of the Good Samaritan and asked us, “who is your neighbor?”

Who ate with Zacchaeus.

Who washed the feet of his disciples.

⁵ From a paper presented by Andrew Foster Connors at the 2009 meeting of the Lectionary Study Group *The Well* in Austin, Texas.

Who proclaimed the gift and privilege of life by being willing to go to the cross and then the tomb.

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Jason Brown was the highest paid center in the history of the NFL.<sup>6</sup>

He was playing great.

Three other teams wanted him.

And he loved football.

But. It wasn't what God was calling him to do.

God was calling him to farm. To grow food. To fight the injustice of hunger.

And so he called the three coaches that were hoping he would sign with their teams and told them that he wouldn't be playing for them. Not because another team had won out, but because he was leaving football all together to farm.

And he didn't know anything about farming. Yet.

He bought a farm. He watched youtube videos.

They started growing sweet potatoes. The first year they gave away 120,000 pounds of sweet potatoes.

At first, Jason Brown made this decision from a place of comfort, he had made more than 20 million dollars.

But within a few years, it wasn't just from his extras, a variety of circumstances beyond his control did away with his surplus, and he was having to trust God in reality, not just in theory.

And now, in 2018, they've given away almost 1,000,000 pounds of food.

A few weeks ago we heard about Ruth, and the practice of gleaning, the practice of leaving some food in the field so that nobody is hungry, so that there is food for everyone.

Jason Brown knows that story, but his farm is different. They don't leave some food in the fields, it's all for the gleaners. Those who are hungry get the first fruits, the name of his farm, and the middle fruits and the last fruits, too. He gives away all that they grow, and he's working on larger justice issues surrounding food insecurity, too.

There are many things I love about Jason Brown's story, but one of the things that I love most is that he doesn't see this as giving something up.

He doesn't see his life as a sacrifice. He sees his life as doing what he's supposed to be doing.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://wisdomforlife.org/>

<https://www.growingagreenerworld.com/jason-brown-football-player-to-farmer/>

<https://goheels.com/news/2018/11/9/football-carolina-insider-duke-fb-preview-wofford-bb-recap-jason-brown.aspx>



Football wasn't better or worse, it simply wasn't what God wanted him to be doing.

He didn't bargain with God, or try and play in the NFL AND farm at the same time,  
 or tell God he didn't know how to farm, and that it didn't make sense.  
 He didn't run the other way, or try and say he was quitting football for any other reason.

That's the kind of kingdom Jesus Christ calls us to live in, the one where we follow our calling, follow our gifts,  
 follow the path God has in mind instead of the one the world recommends or the voices in our own heads think  
 we need to follow.

And I've wondered why I let so much get in the middle,  
 between the call and response.

Why do I let so much *stuff* get in the middle.  
 In the way.

Jesus tells us to put down our nets and follow him,  
 and we say that we will, but first we need to finish up what we're working on.

Why do we see the gifts God gives us and think of them as burdens?

Are we afraid that we will be less of who we are if we give ourselves fully to God,  
 the one who created us and loves us, who saves us and sustains us?

Why do we think that the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires filters and adjustments  
 before we let it into our lives?

Christ has died. Christ has Risen. Christ will come again.

When Jesus asks us to put down our nets,  
 it's not to satisfy some sort of ego-trip, it's because Jesus knows it doesn't work any other way.

Jesus wants to give life. And hope. And Joy.

Jesus wants to find compassion. And justice.

We can meet him.  
 Behind the dumpster.  
 At the lunch counter.  
 In the pew.  
 On the field and in the field.  
 In another political party.  
 Across streets and hemispheres.  
 In our own homes.

He wants us to meet him.  
 To follow him.

And I believe that we are hungry.

We don't want things to be like they are.

We don't want the same contradictions to rule our lives.

And in this season of consumption and hurry and grief and guilt,  
the Good News is that we're offered another way.

We can say no to other things in order to say Yes to Discipleship.

Can you? Can I?

It is, nothing more and nothing less,  
than our salvation.

Who is Jesus?

King of Kings

and

Poor little Mary's boy

Yes he is.