

## **The Church Is....**

Jeremiah 23: 1-6

Colossians 1:11-20

Nov 20, 2022

Stewardship Sunday

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### *Jeremiah 23: 1-6*

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

### *Colossians 1:11-20*

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

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In the liturgical calendar today is Christ the King Sunday, that joyful day on which we finish the year with our hearts and minds celebrating the divinity of Christ and Christ's kingship, Christ's reign, of the cosmos, of the whole universe that speaks of his glory. This day lifts up and honors all that Jesus Christ is as it magnifies the otherness of Christ, reminding us of the Lord who is our righteousness who has the final, the ultimate, grasp of our lives. We pay attention to the depth of the meaning that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, the One through whom God created all things in heaven and on earth, the One who entered this world as Redeemer because its goodness was broken, the One who is not only the source of creation but is also its healing.

Today is our powerful reminder of who God is in Jesus truly is as the image of the invisible God in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. We look once more at the

peace made for all of us through the blood of his cross before we prepare to celebrate his arrival in the Bethlehem manger. Once more we are reminded that we cannot separate the cross from the manger.

Is there a more fitting and appropriate day than Christ the King Sunday on which to have our Stewardship Sunday, the day on our calendar on which we offer and bless our financial pledges for the year's ministries, outreach, needs and programs just ahead of us? It is indeed our day to lift up our responses of gratitude, of thanksgiving, to offer and bless our gifts in grateful response to our God who redeemed us from the darkness, from all the ways we have been scattered in our lives, to be the body of Christ, the Church, to use our diversity of skills, purposes, and spiritual gifts, our time, talent and treasure, so that together as gathered believers we accomplish the mission and the mandate, the great commandment that Jesus gave us, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Christ is the head of the body, the church. The church is the universal body of Christ, holding the whole long, wide and growing line of Christian believers from all times and places. It is our baptism that joins us into the church universal, into the care and the body of Christ. It is the great cloud of witnesses and on through all those who are being baptized this hour. Christ is the head and present in each and all who faithfully proclaim his word and celebrate his sacraments. Those are the two marks which Protestant Reformer John Calvin used to identify the true church when that question was being asked in the 16th century. In this 21st century, Presbyterian pastor Fred Anderson<sup>i</sup> adds another mark which I and many others believe is true and fitting as he suggests, "...another mark of the true church is where women and men not only hear Christ speak in the proclamation of the Word and receive Christ present in water, bread and wine, but then make Christ present in this world as they bear him faithfully in their daily living. Therein, the church, regardless of the denominational name by which it is identified, demonstrates who is its one true head--its Lord. The church, as body of Christ, becomes his living presence in this world when you and I bear Christ from our places of worship into the many places God has called upon each one of us to bear witness to and serve him. You are Christ in your office, in your apartment building, in your neighborhood, in your parenting association, in all of your associations and relationships, public and private. Each of us who has put on Christ in the waters of baptism and lives into that identity--listening for him to speak as God's Word is read and proclaimed and waiting upon him in faith as we receive him in bread and wine--becomes a means by whom Christ is present in this world--a sacrament, if you will, of his real presence in 21st century life."

The church, the universal body of Christ, is also earthed in the local church, the individual congregation who gathers, worships and ministers together in a local area, in unique ways and expressions. Gathered by God in this time, for this place, for a shared life in covenanted faith is Jesus working and walking among us. In the UCC, the autonomy of the local church is a hallmark of our polity, as each local church manages itself, governs itself, yet within a covenantal relationship, and always, always, acknowledging Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

It is as the local church this morning that we offer our thanksgiving, our gratitude, our gratefulness, to the love, the saving grace, the work, to the head of the church, Jesus Christ. It is about the follow-ship and fellowship of Smith Church striving in the name of Jesus Christ to offer a genuine community and a true extravagant welcome as we are deeply committed to making a difference in our local communities and the world. Gathered as this local body of

Christ we gather to be spiritually nurtured as disciples of Christ wherever, however, we are called. It is how we move from the baptismal font, the bread and the cup, to faith and giving.

In our gratitude we act as stewards by how we give, serve, attend and grow. We are mindful that although Stewardship Sunday is one day a year with very concrete and tangible implications, stewardship itself is a way of life in the body of Christ.

From our one local church we give thanks today through celebrating what we value and love about Smith Church and the Smith Community, as it is here that many feel that we are a multi-generational family of steadfast souls on Sundays. In person or in pixels worship at Smith Church makes us happy and completes our day so that we can recharge for the coming week. Here love and acceptance are real and genuine through the church's welcoming spirit. A coffee hour conversation, praying for others, a willingness to share with depth and breadth and talent for the common good, caring for and nurturing one another, all reflect Jesus Christ in our midst. As true believers, true Christians, we sing the songs and hear the stories, the good and the bad, of our faith ancestors, and learn from them as their ancient lessons are contemporary and timeless.

We draw from this well of fellowship and willingly, eagerly, take it our beyond the walls of the church in follow-ship in almost unlimited outreach knowing it is worth the effort and never losing sight of the fact that our mission is to be as a beacon in Hillsboro for faith & groups to meet.

On Christ the King Sunday, on Stewardship Sunday, we offer our gratitude and thanksgiving as from bread and cup, to faith and giving we bring God's grace to every moment we are living a portion of our daily labor, a joyful gift to our loving savior. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. Fred R. Anderson, 'Image of the Invisible' [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf200267a/image\\_of\\_the\\_invisible](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf200267a/image_of_the_invisible)