

Pentecost 14B, Proper 17. Last Sermon at St. Christopher's.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. At my best, over the last seven years, this is all I've really said when I've had the immeasurable privilege to stand in this pulpit among you. This almost slogan is a memorial acclamation from one of our Eucharistic prayers. It serves as the shortest possible Christian creed and it works because each short phrase brings with it so much. We can say that both things are true: it's a little bit more complicated than that, and things really are just that simple. The prose is minimalist, but the implications include most of what I think we have been about together over these years.

Christ has died. Of course, there's a lot here. Most obviously, there's all kinds of stuff about the atonement, about how the work and death of Jesus somehow reconciles us to God. But I'm struck simply by the fact that it's past tense. Well, present perfect, for you blessed pedants in the congregation. But it refers to a particular moment in history. This man, at this time in this town was killed by these people in this way. In our faith, history matters. The transcendent is most normally accessible only through history. I don't mean events that happened a long time ago as much as I mean the specifics of events and people in time, whether that is two thousand years ago or right now. Eternal truths aren't beamed into our souls from beyond history, but are learned or even made through the specifics of actual bodies in relationship with other bodies in actual physical locations. God, for some reason, has chosen to work our salvation through history. And this means that the real specifics of our lives matter—yes to us and to each other but also to God.

And so our joyful response to God's saving work also belongs within history, within the messy, fleshy world of our lives. It sends us into the nitty-gritty, often frustrating real world. We've done this by advocating for Oak Park to become a sanctuary city and pass an affordable housing ordinance, to give real succor to real people. By showing up every month—and some of you every week—to serve at the food pantry. By housing parishioners, Lalo, and the Makuebos. This hard, messy work, where our commitments hit the not-always-totally-compliant real world, is in good company. God saved us through the hard, messy work of a life actually lived with family entanglements and political machinations and rival religious movements. History—what's going on for real people in the real world—matters because that is the place where Jesus saves us.

Christ is risen. Again, there's quite a bit going on there. Most obviously, Jesus is vindicated and death is defeated. But we'll stick with our trope and pay special attention to the fact that this phrase is present tense. The resurrection is not just a past event, not just a moment in time. At the Easter Vigil, we don't sing "Alleluia, Christ rose two thousand years ago." We sing "Alleluia, Christ *is* risen," because the resurrection is present reality now. God now is the one who calls us out of the tomb, who makes life where others see only death, who turns the grave into a garden teeming with life. The divine work of transforming all things into new life is going on right now. The divine work of transforming us into new life is going on right now.

And the future: Christ will come again. Because Christ will come again, we work in the world with humility and hope. Humility because it is Jesus, not us, who will save the world. Our work among our neighbors is in the context of a world whose salvation is coming. But we are not that salvation. As the saying goes, thank God the world has a savior and we are not it. And hope, because that salvation is assured. Anxiety, sadness, and grief are all natural and sometimes faithful responses to the pain of the world. But we do not despair. We have a hope that is deeper than the grave, and the cornerstone of that hope is coming. Christ will come again.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. These are dependable truths, that persevere over time and certainly through pastoral transitions. They are dependable, but not stagnant. They are truths we are always encountering and living into anew. I think it's especially helpful to remember them in a time of transition, like today. As most of you know, today is my last day as your rector. So there is an ending, there. But thankfully today is also the day that we are celebrating the baptisms of Marian and Malcolm, and of Zach, who was baptized earlier this week. At our endings and at our beginnings, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. At the start and at the close, God is making all things new and God is making us new.

I love you and will miss you. I am above all unspeakably grateful for you, for the work God has done among us, and for the work God will continue to do through you. Amen.