

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from August 4, 2013

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two weeks ago I began preaching about the elements of our worship services and the way they proclaim the gospel to us week after week. As we said, the prelude is a musical invitation to worship.

Announcements are a reminder of opportunities to serve God together. Invoking God's name, we gather in unity with God's purposes and nature.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In typical preacher fashion, I'm not ready to move on yet. God as Trinity is rich with meaning and hope. Father and son are family names while Spirit speaks of. . . Spirit. Now, family at its best can be loving and full of grace. But sometimes thinking about family can bring up painful memories and experience.

Our image of God should invite us into God's presence. If one certain image does not draw us, we should leave it and seek another. There are many images of God, truthful and full of grace. Shepherd, care giver, loving spouse, creator, redeemer, mother hen, the newness of morning, a cool stream, living water, bread of life, light of the world, gardener, counselor, King, healer. Many good images for many different experiences and interests. The thought of God should draw us into wholeness and peace—not cause us to cringe or yawn.

Spirit in the Hebrew Bible is Ruach—breath of God. Spirit in the Greek Bible is pneuma—wind, blowing, breath, even the glowing of a volcano. Spirit is the stuff of earth and life. We see spirit when we look out upon the land—the interplay between plants and animals and the land itself. The Spirit is. The Spirit invites us even in our pain, to walk into mercy and peace. To walk into freedom, to allow what is...to be...at the deepest possible level and to learn to rest in the peace of that place. To let go of our worries and concerns which are endlessly produced by our minds and egos which are trying so desperately to protect us and spare us from future trouble.

Unfortunately, our minds do not “let up” when we have done all we can do in the moment. So our thought habits at times drive us to the brink of craziness. Never good enough for our minds--just a few more precautions. We follow the same patterns over and over again, with the same result each time, yet we continue replaying them. Now, the Spirit invites us to rest in God's abundance and fullness--to join the rest of creation which is worry free. Not death free, but worry free.

Rarely does worry protect us. Worrying certainly won't spare us from dying. We will all die, of course. Humanity seeks to avoid death and thinking of death. We have always preferred eternal youth. That's why it's always young people we use to advertise products, even products usually used by older people. This Spirit of life and death, the unity and mercy of all of existence—this Spirit calls us to live and die in the presence of God who always holds us as creator, redeemer and sustainer—in perfect love. Nothing to fear in the presence of perfect love, which is Spirit and Life. In this reality, in this Kingdom, in this reign of Christ, we have nothing to fear.

*True* spirituality is the work of the Spirit inviting us to let go of fear and anxiety. True Spirit is walking with God, responsibly, with accountability, with gentleness and compassion—planning for the future, but not fretting about it. This is the way of contemplation in the Spirit.

The foundation of life in the Spirit is resting in the final and never ending peace of God. Yes, we have fears and we cannot deny them, we cannot eliminate them, but we can dismiss them as soon as we are aware of them. We can choose not to dwell on them. Ahh, but this does require discipline.

We can be mindful of the reign of Christ in all things as we heard today in Colossians and be freed from our relentlessly anxious minds. But it is a constant process.

This is the greatest challenge of our lives--a disciplined thought life. It has the potential to grant us wellness of mind and spirit—a healthy soul and these make for a healthy body too,—all in the presence of God. Everyone has their particular way of waiting in the presence of Christ. The writer of Colossians says, “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” I don't think the writer is talking about an actual place but about a spiritual reality—a way of living with the Spirit “raised with Christ.” The writer continues, “Set your minds on things above, not on things of earth.” I don't believe the writer is forsaking the earth with this statement, but suggesting that we tend to set our minds on things that are not helpful. Our survival mentality, our fear of running out, our fear of being taken advantage of, our fear of being abandoned—left alone.

We need not fear because we have already died—we have been baptized into Christ—we have died to destructive things that were hopeless from the start. “And your life is hidden with Christ in God. As Christ is revealed, so also are we revealed with Christ.” We are one with Christ for we are the Body of Christ. Again, this is why we partake of the bread and the cup whenever we gather. It is a sign that we are the body and blood of our Lord. We are what we eat and drink. We are the body of Christ.

The Spirit calls us into compassion, and mercy, into a living trust in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which infuses all of creation—which gives life to all. As in Colossians, “Christ is all and in all.” Christ is everything worth having, everything worth thinking, everything worth being. Christ is not some mysterious person whom we must set out to find or please. Christ is all that is of true value, God at work in the world to save, to love, to welcome into relationship. This is the eternal, creation-wide Christ Spirit—Alpha and Omega, beginning and end.

Jesus walked upon the earth. Jesus healed, proclaimed life to all who would listen. But he threatened those who didn't want to let go of their say, their grasp on power, those who didn't trust that the way of generosity in all things is the way of life, the way to stay alive, the way to never die the deaths of not enough love, not enough food, not enough security. They clung to their little self realities rather than reaching deep into the mercy of God for the Big Self where God invites us to live. They put him to death, but his life is resurrected in power and mercy to all who seek him—who seek the God and life which he was and offered to all. Christ is all and in all.

The brother in the crowd who asked Jesus to help him get his fair share seems to be stuck on himself. What about me? What about my needs? Perhaps Jesus got the impression that this man would never be satisfied because he was looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places. You can hear Jesus asking, do you really think that if your brother divides his inheritance with you that you will then be satisfied? *Then* you will be content?

Christ-Spirit is calling us every moment, every day. Find the thing that will make you content and invest your life in that! Keep searching relentlessly and do not give up until you find it and then give it all up for that. What is the priceless pearl? Jesus speaks of being rich toward God. What does he mean by that? What does the writer of Colossians mean when he says Christ is all and in all? The writer of Ecclesiastes insists that everything for which we grasp is filled with frustration, despair, and pain. All is vanity. All is meaninglessness. Religion is part of this folly unless it is the Christ-Spirit who calls us into hope and peace. Follow this Spirit who leads us, relentlessly into life and peace. Amen.