

“Pleased to Meet You”
Colossians 1:11-20
Rev. Dexter Kearny
Longview Presbyterian Church
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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.*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Welcome to Christ the King or the Reign of Christ Sunday. This is the Sunday where we remember that Christ rules all things and we give glory and praise to him! These words, king, reign, kingdom imply a form of power. And I wonder what images appear in your head when you hear these words? Do you see King Arthur gallantly trying to figure out how to use his might for right in order to help others? Do you picture King Louis XIV, lording his wealth and grandeur over a starving population? Do you picture patriarchal systems and oppressive dictators that demand more and more from the people until they break? I find that these words that we use to try and understand what Christ’s reign means in our lives often remind us of these harsh worldly forms of power. We picture dictators and

oppression. We imagine ruling through fear and military might. There are so many ways that power is used in our world that reflect our most vindictive and violent selves.

But on Reign of Christ Sunday, we are looking at a form of power that is completely foreign to any picture we might have today. Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, uses a power that relies on love and compassion. It relies on vulnerability and intimacy. Name a government today that looks like that?

And the word that really struck me as I was reading through this theological treatise of a text, was the word pleased in verses 19 and 20. “For in Jesus all the fullness of God was *pleased* to dwell, and through Jesus, God was *pleased* to reconcile to himself all things!” God was pleased, happy, and tickled, to come to earth and dwell with us humans. God was pleased, elated, and excited to bring all things back into right relationship to herself! Because we know that there has been a break in the relationship between God and us. There has been a break that no matter how hard we try, we keep messing up, we keep causing harm, we keep making the poor decision. But God did not and does not give up on us.

Now, I wracked my brain this week to try and find a story of someone who had power and used it in a loving way while at the same time finding delight in the process. It was not an easy task. But eventually I came back to the best book that I have ever read for the perfect story. Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables* begins with a bishop who goes by Monseigneur Bienvenu. Bienvenu is not the main character and disappears completely from the story after the first one hundred pages, but to me, he is the most interesting and likeable characters ever.

So Monseigneur Bienvenu finds himself in a large parsonage in his older age and has two helpful women to help care for him and the home. They have helpfully kept him up to date with the weekly gossip from town when Mademoiselle Magloire begins to let him know all about this new beggar who has come to town. He is dangerous and has been staying across town but perhaps, to be safe, we should get our locks changed. When suddenly there is a knock at the door...

Monseigneur Bienvenu opens the door and who should it be, but Mademoiselle’s dangerous beggar. Monseigneur, what will you do! After hearing the beggar’s spiel, the bishop seems to ignore him and tells Mademoiselle to set another place at the table. And everyone looks around not quite understanding

what is happening. The bishop gets that little smile on his face that comes from being clever before anyone else has picked up on it yet.

Now I believe you know the story, this beggar is Jean Valjean and he steals the silver in the middle of the night. When three men appear at the door, two police escorting Jean Valjean back to the scene of the crime. Mademoiselle Magloire has a knowing and disapproving look on her face. Jean Valjean is looking as guilty as you can. The two police officers expect an easy result before taking him back to prison. The bishop immediately jumps in and says, “So here you are... I’m delighted to see you. Had you forgotten that I gave you the candlesticks as well?” Can you imagine everyone’s face? Shock all around.

I use this extended story because Monseigneur Bienvenu is a reflection of Christ’s pleasure in humanity. It is not judging. It is not vindictive. It is not cynical or greedy. Bienvenu had every right to turn this beggar into the police. Jean Valjean had stolen from him and escaped in the night. But Bienvenu knows Christ’s joy and pleasure and has learned to live like a disciple of this joyful teacher. Bienvenu uses his power and influence as a bishop in order to provide grace and opportunity for Jean Valjean even when he did not deserve it. This is the image of a God who delights in us and in this world. A God who takes joy in providing surprises; when we expect judgment but instead receive grace.

All because of this little word, pleased. God is delighted in us. That is the power that God has, a hope that will not quit, a light that shines in the darkness, a joy that will not be squashed. God delights in us and we delight in God. That is faith. That is Christianity. That is what disciples do. Because it is out of this delight that we work for reconciliation amongst brokenness. It is out of pleasure that we strive for justice for the least of these. It is out of delight that we pursue connection with God, with our neighbors, with creation, and with ourselves in an increasingly disconnected world.

And that is why we give our allegiance to Christ. Not because we were forced. Not because we are afraid. Not because of military might or threat of punishment. But because our God has delight and that delight is in us and in our neighbors and in our world. This is the type of kingdom that we live in.

So today, at the end of the church calendar, at the end of our What Disciples Do series, and as we turn in our estimates of giving, I challenge you to be pleased

in what we are doing. Be tickled in learning more about yourself and your desires so that in them you can connect to God's desires. Take delight in the sharing of financial gifts that empower our mission in this city. Be elated in the work of caring for the least of these as children and families find home and food and safety through our actions. And through this joy, in Christ's reign, may we begin to be filled with hope and light and joy so that we can share those good gifts with a world that desperately needs it.