November 20, 2022 ~ The Reign of Christ ~ May you be made strong!

I speak to you in the name of the King of Kings, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the end of the church year. And next Sunday, November 27, we begin anew with Advent and we will have our lessons and carols service.

Endings are always powerful but they are not always pleasant. How was your year? Maybe it was glorious and you were blessed with a new baby in your family or a special post-covid trip or a new home or a meaningful new job. I was privileged to bless in the Regional last week my great-nephew Ali, son of my niece Jessika.

My year was definitely not pleasant and even though parts of it, such as our first month walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain on my sabbatical, were glorious, I would not want to repeat the hard parts. The parts that knocked me to my knees in pain and in sorrow.

In fact, I would do anything to go back one year and somehow try to change what happened with my husband Jouni and his devastating stroke. I am sure if you had a tough year, you would wish to do the same. But the truth is that we cannot go back and in fact, Jesus wants us to continue looking forward with hope. For all of you who are grieving the passing of loved ones, this can be extremely difficult.

The message from our passage this morning from Paul’s letter to Christians in Colossae, what we know as Colossians, is an important message for ending the year, especially if you have been enduring hard times throughout the past 12 months. Deaths. Illnesses. Financial worries. Loss of jobs. Toxic work environments. Nasty neighbours.

Here's what Paul writes:

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from God’s glorious power

May you endure everything with patience

May you give thanks to God with joy

Then Paul includes an early Christian hymn in this letter. And I wish we knew the tune! Here are the key phrases in this hymn

Christ is the image of the invisible God

In Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created.

Christ holds all things together

Christ is the head of the church

In Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell

Through Christ, God reconciled to himself all things.

Christ made peace through the blood of his cross.

From Colossians 1:15-20

That early Christian hymn holds the entire truth of Christianity.

Our gospel passage for this morning is from the crucifixion in Luke’s gospel. Jesus came down so that you and I would be raised up. A very different kind of king. A very different kind of reign. A reign filled with godly wisdom.

I wish to share with you a story about wisdom.  
*In a small Italian town, hundreds of years ago, a small business owner owed a large sum of money to a loan-shark. The loan-shark was a very old, unattractive looking guy that just so happened to fancy the business owner’s daughter.*

*He decided to offer the businessman a deal that would completely wipe out the debt he owed him. However, the catch was that he would only wipe out the debt if he could marry the businessman’s daughter.*

*Needless to say, this proposal was met with a look of disgust.*

*The loan-shark said that he would place two pebbles into a bag, one white and one black.*

*The daughter would then have to reach into the bag and pick out a pebble. If it was black, the debt would be wiped, but the loan-shark would then marry her. If it was white, the debt would also be wiped, but the daughter wouldn’t have to marry the loan-shark.*

*Standing on a pebble-strewn path in the businessman’s garden, the loan-shark bent over and picked up two pebbles.*

*Whilst he was picking them up, the daughter noticed that he’d picked up two black pebbles and placed them both into the bag.*

*He then asked the daughter to reach into the bag and pick one.*

*The daughter naturally had three choices as to what she could have done:*

1. *Refuse to pick a pebble from the bag.*
2. *Take both pebbles out of the bag and expose the loan-shark for cheating.*
3. *Pick a pebble from the bag fully well knowing it was black and sacrifice herself for her father’s freedom.*

*She drew out a pebble from the bag, and before looking at it ‘accidentally’ dropped it into the midst of the other pebbles. She said to the loan-shark;*

*“Oh, how clumsy of me. Never mind, if you look into the bag for the one that is left, you will be able to tell which pebble I picked.”*

*The pebble left in the bag is obviously black, and seeing as the loan-shark didn’t want to be exposed, he had to play along as if the pebble the daughter dropped was white, and clear her father’s debt.*

I hope and I pray that you and I are blessed with similar wisdom. I hope and I pray that King Charles III shows the wisdom of Solomon.

May the loving reign of Christ the King bless us with wisdom and may we always be made strong to endure everything that life sets before us. I am helped by the power of prayer and by the words of hope from the Bible. Just saying them out loud makes things easier.

Once again in the words of the apostle Paul

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from God’s glorious power* (Colossians 1:11)

Amen.