



St. Anne's Episcopal Parish
Church Circle • Annapolis, MD • 21401

Parish Offices & Education Building
Location at 199 Duke of Gloucester St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone : 410-267-9333
Fax 410-280-3181
www.stannes-annapolis.org

Amy Richter
 Proper 29C/Reign of Christ/Christ the King: Luke 23:22-43
 St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, MD
 November 21, 2010
Reframing

Perception is everything. Today is the last Sunday after Pentecost. It's also called Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday.

The name Christ the King may conjure up different images, different perceptions. The fact that we have no monarch in the United States, for instance, does not keep some of us from being fascinated with royalty. This week's news about the impending wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, for example, brought this headline to the *Capital*: "British brides live in fear of the royal wedding date." When the happy couple weds in London, there will undoubtedly be transportation snarls, fully-booked hotels, and security issues. The article reports, "Fear and horror are spreading through British bridal circles – and a whole new batch of young women are ready to pitch a royal hissy fit." One bride-to-be quipped, "I'm supposed to be the princess, and now I have a real princess to compete with."ⁱ

Is this what royalty looks like to us? Media spectacle? Bridezilla? Quaint old traditions? Is there something meaningful in the image? Perception makes a difference.

The Gospel lesson for today shows Jesus on the cross, because it's on the cross that Jesus most decisively shows himself to be our king. Although, on the cross, Jesus looks anything but a king. The royal language in today's text is more taunt than title, "If you are the king . . ." Even the sign over the cross is a title of derision. "The King of the Jews" is placed above Jesus as a sign to Jesus and to all the Jews that the Romans would not tolerate such upstarts, or anyone who would lay claim to power they believed was theirs. Jesus a king?

Perception makes all the difference. We know that two people can look at exactly the same sight and yet see two very different things. My parents would stand at the kitchen window looking into their backyard. Deer often passed through. My mother saw long-legged vermin who were destroying her flower beds and wished that hunting were legal in their suburban neighborhood. My father saw Bambi, and sometimes set out salt licks and food for them in the winter. Perception makes a difference.

We don't always see clearly what is really in front of us. Sometimes, to see things clearly, we need to adjust our view. Christina Baldwin writes, "Life is a great unending opportunity to see things differently, to keep reframing disaster and discouragement into faith."ⁱⁱ To keep reframing disaster and discouragement into faith. My former spiritual director, Holly Whitcomb, often asked me, if I were describing something that seemed like an obstacle, a hurt, or a disappointment, especially if it seemed to hang on, "Can you see this experience as a messenger who is trying to tell you something? Can you regard this time as a gift from which you may gain some new insight or understanding?" Not that God causes suffering or desires us to know pain, but God does bless us with insight if we're willing not to be trapped by our circumstances, but to look for the grace, be open to the possibilities, "to explore the edges for growth."ⁱⁱⁱ

Learning to "reframe," as Baldwin says, "disaster and discouragement into faith" takes some practice. It's about more than just seeing something pleasant where something unpleasant exists. It's not wishful thinking or ignoring reality. It is about perceiving reality with the eyes of faith. It is sometimes about shifting our focus, relying on a deeper truth that may not be apparent on the surface. It often comes by being steeped in some basic truths that have to do with who God is and who we are, foundational truths through which we can see all other reality.

Holly Whitcomb, again, told about meeting a woman named Gail at a retreat. Gail was a wonderful, warm, centered person who emanated a gentle self-confidence and an unshakable faith in God. Gail said when she was a little girl, her parents hung a sign on the footboard of her bed that read: "Mom and Dad love Gail. God loves Gail." . . . [when e]very night Gail was tucked into bed, she could look down and absorb that triumphant message of unconditional love." After hearing this, Holly decided she would offer her own children the gift of those affirming words. Every night for four years,

she went upstairs and bestowed on them a benediction before bed: Mom and Dad love David. God loves David. Mom and Dad love Katie. God loves Katie.

Holly said, it became “a routine that once in a while . . . I . . . had little energy for. Some nights I had to drag myself up those stairs to confer my spent and overtired blessing. But then, one day, I was out of town leading a retreat, and I found a piece of paper stuck in my purse . . . from my daughter Katie. The wrinkled paper read: Katie and David and Dad love Mom. God loves Mom.”

What do you see? Overtired mom dragging herself upstairs saying the same old sentences even she has lost inspiration for? Faithfulness in the small ordinary things that make a huge difference?

What do you see? Our master perception-shifting story is the crucifixion. Two criminals hang on either side of Jesus. One joins the crowd in mocking Jesus. The other says what he sees. “I’m getting what I deserve, but this man is innocent. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus, as unroyal-looking a man as ever there was, responds, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” One man saw a criminal. The other saw a king.

There are more grand pictures of Jesus that could be held before our eyes today when we praise him as our king, but here, on the cross is where he shows himself to be truly worthy of our adoration and praise. On the cross is where he bears the full brunt of the pain the world gave him because he proclaimed a kingdom marked by love and humility, a kingdom of forgiveness and the promise of paradise.

Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie were two Christians who were imprisoned by the Nazis for hiding Jews in their home in Holland. Corrie survived the imprisonment and told their story in a book called *The Hiding Place*. The sisters were able to smuggle a Bible with them into the barracks where they were being held with other women in terrible, overcrowded conditions. In addition to sickness, starvation, and indignity, the women were packed into small spaces and given only straw-covered platforms to crowd into to sleep. The straw was infested with fleas. Corrie said to her sister, “Betsie, how can we live in such a place!” Betsie said, “Show us. Show us how.” Corrie wrote, “It was said so matter of factly it took me a

second to realize she was praying. ‘*Corrie!*’ she said excitedly. ‘*He’s given us the answer!* In the Bible this morning. . . First Thessalonians: ‘Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances.’ That’s it, That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing [here]!’ I stared at her; then around me at the dark, foul-aired room.

“‘Such as?’ I said.

“‘Such as being assigned here together.’

Okay. ‘Yes, thank you Lord.’

“‘Such as the Bible.’

“‘Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here!’

“‘Thank You for all these women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages.’ . . .

“Betsie looked at me expectantly. ‘Corrie!’ she prodded.

“‘Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed suffocating crowds.’

“Betsie went on serenely, ‘Thanks for the fleas.’

“The fleas! This was too much. ‘Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.’

“‘Give thanks in all circumstances,’ she quoted. ‘It doesn’t say, “in pleasant circumstances.” Fleas are part of this place.’

“And so we stood between tiers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.”

Because they began to thank instead of complain, Corrie wrote, “Life in Ravensbruck took place on two separate levels. One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.” They read the

Bible, not just to themselves, but to those around them; soon all gathered at the end of everyday to listen. The mood of all the women lightened, they even began telling each other stories and jokes. They noticed that in all other areas of the camp they were heavily guarded, but in their sleeping room, the women had almost no supervision at all. They wondered why.

Then one day, they figured it out. The fleas. No guards would come near them because of the fleas. Corrie wrote, “I remembered Betsie's bowed head, remembered her thanks to God for creatures I could see no use for.”

Jesus Christ is our King. He reigned from a cross and now reigns in heaven, but surprises us still by inviting us into his kingdom, here, already within us, and into Paradise to be with him forever.

ⁱ AP, London, *The Capital* (Annapolis MD), Saturday, November 20, 2010, A3.

ⁱⁱ In Holly W. Whitcomb, *Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting* (Augsburg Books, 2005), 63.

ⁱⁱⁱ Whitcomb, 65.