

Pastor Jana Schofield
Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA
Christ the King Sunday
November 21, 2021
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

This week there's been one person who has especially been on my mind and heart. So many people have been affected by the flooding in Whatcom County who are recovering from lost or damaged property, or homes, or businesses, or livestock. But the one person who I can't get out of my mind, heart, and prayers, is Jose Garcia, the resident of Everson whose truck was swept away by floodwaters on Monday. He was last known to be clinging to a tree as he talked with his family on the phone. But the security that he sought in that tree wasn't enough, it couldn't hold him, and his body was found on Wednesday.

Jose's death was a tragedy, and we will lift his loved ones in prayer today. But what I can't get out of my mind is the tree that he was clinging to. How holding on to it didn't make him secure.

I obviously hope and pray that none of us ever has the experience of having to cling on to something for our literal lives. But it begs the question, what is it that we are clinging to that doesn't hold us, what is it that we are holding on to that doesn't really make us secure?

Today is known in the church as Christ the King Sunday. It's essentially the pinnacle of the church year - it's the last Sunday in the church year and reminds us that Jesus is ruler over our lives as we prepare for a new church year beginning with Advent and await the birth of the vulnerable baby Jesus.

Christ the King Sunday is actually a relatively new festival day in the church. It was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to counter communism in Russia and fascism in Italy and Spain, precursors to the Nazism that would soon seize Germany. It's clear that the pope wanted to give Christians something more secure to hold on to than what he regarded

as destructive forces in the modern world. He wanted Christians to worship a divine mighty ruler, a supreme authority, a powerful king who would win at any cost.

It makes sense that to counter the power of earthly rulers the pope wanted to make Jesus out to be even stronger. But what I find so interesting is that Jesus did not align himself with the values of power, might, and authority. He was not about winning at all costs.

In fact, Jesus says in the gospel today that his kingdom was not from this world. His values were not the same values as Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who ultimately sentenced Jesus to death.

When Pilate asks him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answers him, "You say I am a king." Jesus himself had chosen humility, surrender, and generosity throughout his entire ministry. Instead of winning at all costs, Jesus paid the ultimate cost—death on the cross. In the verses following today's gospel Jesus will be arrested as a falsely accused criminal, and will be put to death, for us. As theologian Jurgen Moltmann proposed, our Christian faith has a God that was crucified.

Jesus' entire agenda was about self-giving love. That's why he answers Pilate, "If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." If Jesus' followers were looking for their security in might, authority, and power, they would look to Pontius Pilate. But instead, Jesus' followers had experienced the transformation or Jesus' grace, forgiveness, love, mercy, and abundance. They realized that Jesus' entire being was about self-giving love, about humble service, about selfless sacrifice. Those values are where they found hope and security and they, too, adopted those values.

Which brings us back to asking, what is the source of our security? We often hold on to the same societal values of those in authority—power, prestige, might, and control. We search for security in violence and in winning at any cost. As Palmer Parker says, "violence is what happens

when we don't know what else to do with our suffering." Holding on to those values not only has a destructive effect on our spirits, but it also can be destructive to our faith.

Because if we see Jesus as the one who wins at any cost; if we believe that Jesus is all about power, prestige, might, and control, we might think that Jesus failed to save Jose Garcia as he clung to the tree in the floodwaters last Monday. We might think that Jesus messed up. That Jesus isn't really all that powerful. Maybe we'd even lose faith in Jesus.

But that's when we have to listen again to what Jesus says: "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus' purpose is not to magically keep people from experiencing difficulty or even death. Jesus does not swoop in with a sword or a gun to protect us. Jesus does not arrive on a chariot, but on a donkey. Jesus knows that true security will never be found in the values of this world of violence, retaliation, might, authority, and power.

True security, true hope, comes from the demonstration of true love. That is truth that Jesus came to testify to.

It wasn't that Jesus failed to save Jose Garcia in those floodwaters on Monday. The truth is that Jesus was in the water with Jose Garcia when he could no longer hold on to the tree. The truth is that Jesus had his arms outstretched when he welcomed Jose into the kingdom of heaven. The truth is that Jesus gave his life for Jose on a tree, so that he could hold on to Jose when the tree Jose was clinging to couldn't hold on to him.

If you are searching for security, you will continue to be distraught if you're trying to find it in might, in violence, in winning at any cost. You will continue to be disappointed again and again if you are clinging to the powers of this world.

But if you hold on instead to the values of Jesus and adopt his rule of humble service and self-giving love, you will find stability, you will find

peace, and you will find you will find hope. You will find a truth you can cling to—a truth that will always hold on to you. Amen.