

“That’s It!”

The Christ The King sermon by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented November 20th, 2016,
at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Luke 23:33-43

Joy and Phil Rodgers’ past summers have been spent in the Collingwood area, not far from the “Blue Mountain”, fondly referred to as “The Blue” by locals and skiers alike. “The Blue” is a four season resort village built into the side of the escarpment overlooking the south shore of Georgian Bay. Go to an open area near the village centre and there you will find a chess board on steroids painted on the sidewalk where on-lookers can observe the play of two combatants challenging each other, moving their life-sized chess pieces from one space to another. If you stand in the midst of the crowd long enough, you will eventually hear someone say, “That’s it!” It might be a soft whisper or a matter-of-fact statement or even an enthusiastic exclamation, but it will be the announcement of a spectator who realizes that the game is over. There are still chess pieces left on the board, moves to be made, pieces to be removed, but just the same, That’s it!” “It’s over”. Even if the soon-to-be-loser doesn’t realize it, the spectator and the soon-to-be-winner know that the decisive move has been made and the outcome assured. No matter how long the loser prolongs the game and thinks there is hope of winning, he hasn’t a chance. Those who know what is happening see, before anyone else, the victor. Luke gives us a chance to watch and learn from another kind of encounter: the one between Pilate and Jesus. There is Pilate, that Teflon, wily and cynical old-timer who has out-manoeuvred all challengers. He is definitely someone you don’t fool with and he definitely is in charge. He’ll toy with you and then swoop in for the kill. But then here comes Jesus, the young upstart from the boonies who has been raising eyebrows with his persistence and skillful surprising strategies. No matter how good he is, however or how many people are rooting for him, the odds are very much against his displacing that crafty old control-freak Pilate. Who is in charge here? Who is going to win this power struggle? Jesus? You think?

You can almost see the sneer on Pilate’s face. What a match it turns out to be! At first, Pilate is curious and a bit annoyed. He wants to know if Jesus really is a threat because he’s heard stories about how clever this fellow is. Now he wants to find out for himself. “Are you the champ?” he asks. “Are you the new gunslinger who is supposed to be really fast on the draw? Are you the new kid with the never-before-seen offensive moves who can also play terrific defense? Are you the one who is going to take over my place of power, position, of honour?” As the conversation continues, we get the feeling that if cigarettes had been invented at that time, Pilate would be chain-smoking them intensely as his curiosity and discomfort turn to agonized puzzlement and dejection. This Jesus is no ordinary player. Jesus’ strategy is brand new. Because Pilate lives in a world of intimidation and cruelty and mercilessness, he cannot comprehend what Jesus is bringing to the table. It’s a different reality, unlike anything Pilate has seen before. Pilate is out of his league as he faces Jesus’ strong resistance, mysterious mercifulness and unrelenting compassion. He doesn’t know how to deal with it, so he wants the match to end.

As we watch Pilate squirm and take another deep drag on his cigarette, we faithful believers say, “That’s it!” The game is over, even though there are still a few more moves to be made by the ultimate loser. As the faithful have internalized the reality of this revelation, they have chosen many different ways to express their confidence and joy. Like observers at a chess game, some of the faithful quietly whisper their affirmations, their “That’s It!” in their centering prayers and their daily mantras. And if you listen carefully you can hear strains of Leonard Cohan’s beautiful anthem “Hallelujah!”. Humanity’s fate is sealed. God’s love will redeem all Creation. This the church proclaims: “That’s it!”. That’s our job. That’s what we are here for.

The Church proclaims Christ is the head of the body; not just the Orthodox Church, not just the Roman Catholic Church, not just the myriad of Protestant Mainline, Free, Evangelical, or Pentecostal

churches; he is head and present in each and all who faithfully proclaim his word and celebrate his sacraments.

We are the church and Christ reigns in and through each of us. As a consequence, you and I are called to be Christ to others, seeking reconciliation where there is alienation, healing where there is brokenness--brokenness in the church, brokenness in this nation, brokenness in this world. This is our mandate, our mission, our vocation. As Christ bearers, we are called to be as concerned for the value of life in Iraq as we are for the fetus in a mother's uterus...the value of life locked up in our prisons as we are the value of the growing child. Why? Because it is Christ who is head of the church and becomes present in this world each time you and I make him sovereign in our own lives. He is the beginning, not only the One through whom creation came into being, but the One through whom the new creation is unfolding--the new beginning--the firstborn of the dead. Our hope in the face of death is the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ of God.

He is the end--the firstborn of God's new creation--the one in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, not only to redeem and restore, but also to reconcile things--not just some things, but all things. This is startling, regal, inclusive language that reveals the reign of Christ in which you and I live and move and have our being right now.

The careful, believing, faithful observers become the exuberant recipients of the kind of truth that Pilate could not comprehend. So overcome by the turn of events that they can barely find words to express themselves, they move quickly into Hallelujahs and Amens and bountiful praise. Handel composed the Hallelujah Chorus in his *Messiah*, which was his glorious way of saying, "That's it!", a response that seems to be similar to what happens when observers at a chess match utter the very same words. In the match between Pilate and Jesus, we know who the ultimate victor will be. Pilate and all the other tyrants who have come after him for 20 centuries or more will challenge Jesus and his way of living and dying. Some of the challengers will think that they have come up with a new move to get the best of the champion. But they never will. Hallelujah! The winning move has been made. That's it! Thanks be to God!