

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King  
Colossians 1:11-20, Psalm 95, Luke 23:33-43  
November 20, 2016  
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This morning I want to tell you two stories. You can decide whether or not they are true.

Once upon a time in galaxy far, far away, there was a church with a priest that was much beloved. At some point, it seemed good to move the church to a new place. And they named the church after their divine leader. The little church flourished and grew, and the priest and congregation made beautiful music together that sounded throughout the planet.

One day when the priest was older, he had been working hard in the office all morning writing his message for the upcoming Sunday. He went home for lunch and then decided to take a little nap before returning to the church. Well, he never woke up, and the church was sad and broken-hearted. They knew they would never find another priest like him.

However, the leaders started looking around and found a young priest from a planet not far away to the south. He had an unusual first name like that of a great city on a planet to the north, but they selected him anyway. They weren't sure if anyone could replace their former priest, but they decided to give this young man a chance, and he moved in with his wife and small son and daughter.

Things went really well for the church, so much so that they soon built a bigger space to worship in with a tall ceiling and gorgeous colored windows. Everyone was happy and once again the people and priest made resplendent music together that resounded throughout the planet. In fact, they were so happy together that the priest stayed for 36 years, and even after he retired, he stayed close by.

You can imagine how awful this departure and separation were after they were together so very long. And once again the people thought that they could never recover from such a loss and ever find a person like him.

They started searching and searching and searching. For a year they looked high and low. One woman told the leaders that she had heard a young priest speak at a funeral in a neighboring town. She said he had a bright smile and spoke well even if he did talk with a peculiar accent.

The leaders contacted the man, and he expressed some interest, but summer was coming, and he went on vacation and apparently forgot all about them. In the meantime, another man was very interested and said he would come from a distant planet. The leaders were very excited, as

you can imagine, after more than a year of looking and praying, they finally would have their new priest.

But something went wrong, and at the last minute, the man said he had decided not to come after all. What a blow! Maybe their divine leader wasn't who they thought he was. Maybe they would never find a new priest.

Much discouraged and desperate now, they decided to call that young man with the foreign speech again. This time he was eager to send his resume. The church then sent a small group to meet him, hear him preach and have lunch together. They talked and laughed and thoroughly enjoyed each other's company. The young man told his wife afterwards that if everyone in the church was like those folks, he'd be a fool not to go there if they asked him.

He was invited to come to the church and meet with the top brass, and shortly thereafter, they asked him to be their next priest. Of course he said yes, and he moved with his wife and two young boys. Once again a love affair between priest and congregation quickly unfolded, and the church was again producing a new melody that wafted throughout the larger community.

Another wonderful thing happened as well. The older, retired priest, so adored by everyone, was able to attend the church as well. Everyone was very happy and they thanked their divine leader for being so very good to them again and again.

My second story happened a long time ago in a distant country. A man had lost his job and couldn't afford to feed his family. His only option, he thought, was to try to rob a rich man, but he was easily caught and thrown in the slammer.

Another man just liked to pillage and steal for the fun of seeing how much he could get away with. He had been quite successful until he was also caught after a brazen heist attempt upon a high-ranking community official. The next day both men were to be executed.

The family man was crestfallen. He had utterly failed his family and would die in disgrace. The other thief just figured that one day his luck would run out and he would have to face the gallows.

On that fateful day, a third man was crucified between the two thieves. The family man couldn't help but notice that he was different. He was facing his death with calm and dignity. He had even done the unimaginable: He had forgiven the very people that were driving the nails into his hands and feet.

When the other thief started haranguing the man in the middle along with the rest of the crowd, the family man had to use his dying breath to say something in the man's defense. When the day had started, he had thought that his end had come. He was without hope in the

worst possible way. Suddenly, Jesus was promising him the brightest future possible – Paradise.

With Jesus as our Lord of lords and King of kings, we can be sad and grieving for a while or even for a season over any and every loss in our lives, but with patience, prayer, love and faith, the sun will rise again – sometimes, brighter than ever. AMEN.