

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
4th Sunday after Epiphany, Year B, January 28, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Christ In All Things”
1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Do you remember the story of the Little Red Hen?; she finds some grains of wheat and asks her barnyard friends, the duck, the goose, the cat, and the pig to help her plant them: “Not I,” each one says; as the wheat starts to grow, she asks her friends to help her tend it: “Not I,” each one says; when the wheat is ripe, she asks her friends to help her harvest it: “Not I,” each one says; she asks her friends to help her carry it to the mill to be made into flour: “Not I,” each one says; she asks them to help her make the flour into dough: “Not I,” each one says; she asks them to help her bake it: “Not I,” each one says; but finally, when the bread is cooked, she asks if they want to help her eat it: they all say, “I will, I will;” but the Little Red Hen says, “since you didn’t help me with any of the work, I’m going to eat it all by myself”; what do you think—was that the right thing to do?; this is the kind of story that Jesus might have told as a parable, using people instead of animals, to get people thinking

however you think about what the Little Red Hen did, do you recognize that something very important has been left out of the story; can you think what it is?; what’s been left out is God; God created the grains that the Little Red Hen found; God gave the soil and the sunshine and the rain that allowed the grains to grow into wheat; and God gave people—the Hens in this story—the brains to be able to figure out how to cultivate wheat, how to grind grain into flour, how to make flour into dough, and how to bake dough to make bread; so even if the Little Red Hen does not want to share the fruits of her labor with the duck and the goose and the cat and the pig, because they wouldn’t help her with any of the work, at least she needs to recognize that she couldn’t have make that bread, all by herself, but owes thanks to God for the fruits of God’s great bounty; and maybe then she might look around to see if the right thing to do wouldn’t be to share some of God’s bounty with her barnyard neighbors

our 1st Corinthians reading today gives us a powerful statement about how we all stand totally dependent upon God; Paul says, “for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist;” even if you have not

read this epistle of Paul's recently, the wording should sound somewhat familiar to you; you hear something like it every week; our Eucharistic Prayer today will conclude with these words giving glory to Christ "by him, and with him, and in him;" Paul and our liturgy both remind us that our lives are totally and eternally encompassed by the power and presence of God

but our society teaches us to look at the world through the perspective of the Little Red Hen; that whatever we earn from our hard work, we deserve to use it all for ourselves; we are taught to store up treasures for ourselves; but what does Jesus teach us instead?; Jesus tells us to acknowledge that all we are and all we have comes from God; Jesus tells us to share the bounty we have received from God with our neighbors, and with any of God's children who might be in need; Jesus tells us to develop a depth of relationship with God and with God's people—and who is not one of God's people?; Jesus demonstrated with his life and his teachings that we are each incredibly rich with God's gifts and God's blessings and that God expects us to share his gifts and blessings and love as widely as we possibly can

this is not just a recognition of the way we are to live as Christian individuals and families; it is also a recognition of the way we are to live as the parish family of Christ and Grace Church: Jesus tells us, as a Christian community, to be giving of our ministries to God's people who are not yet, or who may even never be members of our parish; Jesus tells us, as a Christian community, to make sure that we don't store up our treasures just for our own church community, but for sharing our ministries, our buildings, and our collective selves with our neighbors and with all of God's children

I hope and pray that I have helped you realize, if you hadn't already known it, over this interim time, that Christ and Grace was not the former Rector's church, nor has it been the Interim Rector's church, nor will it be the new Rector's church, nor is it even the past, present, or future members of this parish's church—it is God's church; and as God's church we must always direct our energies, ministries, and mission beyond ourselves and beyond our own needs, to serve God's larger purposes

you might recall that on my first Sunday with you I based my sermon on a prayer to set the tone for our interim time together; anybody remember what that prayer was or anything that it said?; just in case it has slipped your mind, I've had it printed in the bulletin today in the middle of page 3, just after the Rector Search

Prayer; this prayer has continued to be a good reminder that, in the same way that we have been looking at the Little Red Hen's outlook and at the very different outlook that Jesus taught throughout his life, that God is the ultimate source and the ultimate recipient of all that we undertake in our life of faith; and that it is God who accomplishes his purposes through our work and ministries

let's pray it together now, slowly, reflecting upon, and giving thanks for, the many ways God has answered this prayer for us over the past year and how it can continue to guide you into the years to come: "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen;" just to be sure it sinks in, we'll pray it one more time at the close of the Prayers of the People

make sure that God is not left out of your story: your individual life story, your family's story, this parish's story, and the story that is getting played out in the wider Petersburg community around you; remember whose church this is; and remember that everything we do is by Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ