

SERMON Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints – Kate Christiansen-Martin

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Colossians 3: 1-4, 8- 11

3 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your * life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. * These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. *

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but **Christ is all and in all!**

Luke 12: 13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ ¹⁴But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ ¹⁵And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”’ ¹⁸Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and

build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ²⁰But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’

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So Jesus is standing before disciples and a crowd of thousands. He had been teaching about prayer, casting out demons, warning about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who used their power to oppress others, when out of nowhere a man stands up and interrupts him, saying, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’

That man stood up, unsolicited, and asked Jesus to take sides in a dispute between two brothers over their inheritance. This is not a matter of justice. No, it’s a family squabble over money. A family dispute over inheritance money is not Jesus’ concern. Jesus does not offer his opinion.

But Jesus does readily share his opinion about people and money. His concern is about amassing money only for personal gain, about self-centeredness, about greed and how it distracts us from God.

He tells the parable about the rich man who cares only for himself. We hear the man’s own words:

“What should I do, for I have no place to store **my** crops?”

“I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones,

I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods. I will say to **my soul**, Soul,

you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

Lots of I's and my's in this man's thinking. The only time the man uses a pronoun that is not I or my, is when he is talking to his own soul. Then he uses You. And tells his soul to relax, eat, drink, be merry. So for all intents and purposes, it's another I.

That poor rich man. He cannot see beyond himself. We don't know if he has family, friends, neighbors or workers that he cares about. We don't hear anything concern about anyone or anything else – only I or my. We don't hear even a hint of gratitude toward God for the bountiful harvest or to those who work for him to plant or harvest the crop. We definitely don't hear that he will be sharing any of his harvest with anyone.

God calls him “a fool.”

Jesus is warning those whose life is centered around accumulating more and more treasure to make themselves rich, that it is foolishness. As in the story of Martha and Mary, Jesus wanted his followers to know that Martha's distraction by many things distracted her from God. The rich man's focus on himself, his wealth and his greed distracted him from God.

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians warns against greed is, calling it idolatry. He instructs the early Christians to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is,” clothing themselves “with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” and “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!”

Paul told the members of that early church to reject greed, to clothe themselves in Christ and remind themselves that they are made in the image of our Creator, and to recognize that Christ is all and in all. Jesus expected his followers to be “rich toward God.” While he did not spell out what that meant in this text his teachings give us a clue. Spending time with God so that we might be guided in our actions, welcoming the stranger, serving others, sharing what we have, embracing the outcast, loving our neighbor – these are all examples that Jesus lived and taught. They can guide us in ways that are rich toward God.

In the spirit of being rich toward God, renewing ourselves in the knowledge of God and being inclusive because Christ is in all, I would like to share our “Holy Troublemaker & Unconventional Saint” for today, Kate Christiansen-Martin. Now, I don’t imagine you are familiar with Kate Christiansen-Martin. She is not famous. I had not heard of her until I read this book. So let me tell you about her.

Kate grew up in Oregon. When she was 12 years old her mother was diagnosed with brain cancer. Kate took care of her mother while she was fighting cancer. She even took her senior year of high school off to care for her mother when she was dying. When her mom died, she experienced deep grief.

Throughout her childhood, her mother was important to Kate. As an adult, a wife and mother of four sons, being a mother was important to her. Mothering was important to Kate.

Kate, developed an inclusive view of mothering, perhaps one that some would consider radical. Kate believes that a person does not have to be a woman to be a mother, to mother another. Kate asserts that Jesus mothered. Like a mother, Jesus reached out those who were sick, hurting or struggling. He touched them and healed their wounds. He would stop what he was doing to listen to people who had been rejected by society or hurt by their culture, lending a caring ear. He taught his followers about caring, loving, and serving each other. He was like a mother bear. Kate said, “Jesus was a man who mothered the world.”

Some years after her mother’s death, Kate married a man who was the pastor of a conservative Christian church and became a pastor’s wife. In that role, what people expected to be her identity, she had lots of responsibilities related to church functions. She also came to realize that their church treated women unfairly and that a great amount a patriarchy existed in the church. She felt miserable, saying, “Being a pastor’s wife made me a feminist.” So she decided to learn more about her faith and the history of Christianity.

In looking closely at scripture, she found instances of female images for God. In the Creation story, the Spirit hovered over the water. Well the noun for Spirit in Genesis is feminine. One of the Old Testament names for God was “El Shaddai,” which can be translated as “Many Breasted One;” demonstrating how close God is to her people, nourishing her people. The Spirit of God in the tabernacle in the

wilderness is named, "Shekinah," another female name. Jesus compared God to a mother hen, sheltering her chicks under her wings. And Jesus assured his disciples that he would send his Spirit and "She will comfort you." The Greek word for Wisdom and the Holy Spirit is "Sophia," a female name. And I will add that in Genesis we hear that male and female are made in the image and likeness of God.

As Kate looked at Christian history, she found the effects of patriarchy and how it treated women unfairly. She looked at Jesus' followers and found women had supported him financially and Mary Magdalene, who was the first to see the resurrected Jesus and was actually called the apostle to the apostles. But the women were not spoken about like the twelve male apostles who were discussed. Kate studied the early church and how it changed over the centuries and denying women leadership roles. She learned that when the church became the official church of the Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine in 313, it strayed from Jesus' teachings and became less accepting and inclusive of women and children and outcasts.

She learned that it was Augustine, who became a bishop in 396, who proposed the idea of "original sin." The concept of original sin was not taught by Jesus or his Jewish faith and does not exist in the Eastern Church. And Augustine, who had difficult relationships with women in his youth, proposed that human's inclination toward evil and its problems were passed on through women. His writings were accepted by church authorities and contributed to some of the conservative church's attitude toward women, even today.

Kate was uncomfortable with the way that her conservative church treated women. She was also uncomfortable with the church's focus on original sin rather than the focus on God creating humans in God's image, the image of the Divine. About the same time, her husband could not accept the way their denomination treated persons who were LGBTQ+ individuals. Together they decided to leave their church and start a new one.

Kate and her husband saw how the church could turn people away from God whose love is for everyone. So they took a risk and left their institutional church which provided them with security and regular income. They started a church in their living room. Their church emphasizes original blessing rather than original sin and that God's love welcomes and accepts everyone for who they are.

Their church also acknowledges God's feminine side. Kate reminds people, "God created you, and She proclaimed you good." Kate explains that "Jesus wanted people to know that God is near, as near as a parent – a mother or a father – tenderly holding their child close." And when Kate needs reminding of a nurturing, mothering God, she can look at her arm. You see, she has had a tattoo of Mother and child there. It reminds her that mothering is for everyone. And she tells people, "Go be a mother."

Jesus did not define "rich toward God" in his story of the rich man. But as we, like Kate, seek to learn more and develop a deeper relationship with God and we look and find, in our faith, an image of God that is more complete and loving, we are enriched. As we seek to welcome those who have been hurt by society or the church, as we seek to accept and affirm all people and treat all people equally, as we work for justice, and try to mother those who are sick and offer love – when we do that as individuals or as a church we become rich toward God. And, the more we do that, I believe, our faith becomes richer as well.