

Title: Christ our Guest

Date: 7/17/2022 (Proper 10, Year C)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings: [Amos 8:1-12](#); [Psalm 52](#); [Colossians 1:15-28](#); [Luke 10:38-42](#)

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/5EURRg8z32I?t=1041>

Eternal God, you draw near to us in Christ and make yourself our guest:
amid the cares of our daily lives,
alert us to your presence
and make us attentive to your voice,
so that we may treasure your word above all else.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son. **Amen.**¹

In *A Prayer Book for Australia*, **this** is the prayer that goes with today's readings. It presents God, in the person of Christ, as the guest in our midst.

Yes, Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.
Yes, in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.
And yes, all things are held together in him
and through him
God was pleased to reconcile Godself to all things.

This grand, cosmic image of Christ
presented by Paul in his letter to the Colossians
stretches from the beginning of creation
all the way to the end of ages.

Paul begins his letter with an image of Jesus
akin to the images of the universe
we got from the James Webb Space Telescope this week.

Just as the view through the lens of that telescope
makes the universe come alive to us in a different way
by showing us what we couldn't see before,²
seeing Jesus through Paul's eyes
encourages us to look up and around
and notice the connections we couldn't see before.

During the pandemic,
churches worked hard to make online worship possible
because that was one of the major ways
we could stay connected as a community.

Praying together,
seeing one another's comments on Facebook,
camping for mission trip in Dave and Susan Saxon's backyard, all of that
helped drive home
the idea that God is all around us,

that we can encounter God
and do and be church no matter where we are.
After all, that was the way early Christians worshipped,
in small groups,
in people's homes,
focused just as much on right practices
as they were on right beliefs.

Now that we are, knock on wood, emerging from the pandemic,
church leaders like me
find ourselves emphasizing the importance of being here,
at church, on top of this hill, on Sunday mornings.
Most of the week, I'm in the PLC by myself,
and I pray that over time,
this hill will be alive with activity during the week, too.

To be clear,
This isn't about inflating our average Sunday attendance,
a number often used to judge the health and vitality of a church.
This isn't about
finding people to keep me company during the week.

This is about seeing connections
and making connections
and strengthening connections.

When we look around us with the awareness
that all things are held together in Christ
and through Christ
God was pleased to reconcile Godself to all things,
we remember that being Christian
is not only about our personal relationship with God,
our personal connection to Jesus.
Through Jesus we have a relationship with **all** of creation,
all things visible and invisible.

Jesus is the head of the body, the church.
Through Jesus each of us is part of the body of Christ,
and we are called to love one another as Christ loved us.
As a member of this body,
each of us has a spiritual gift to share,
each of us has a role,
and we honor one another's gifts,
for without them we would not, could not, be whole.

Therefore, I'm excited for us to kick off everything we do "off the hill."

I hope we can strengthen existing partnerships with Refugee Service of Texas and Menchaca Elementary School. I also hope to create new partnerships.

If you're sitting there and thinking,

“I wonder if people at St Alban's might...”

or “I wonder if St. Alban's can work with...” ,

please please please share those thoughts with me.

The meet and greets we did my first month here also helped drive home how fun and how vital it is for people to meet in small groups.

I'm also very excited for this hill to come alive. (So tempted to make a Sound of Music reference, but I'll refrain (maybe))

Some churches host twelve step groups

or make space for an artist in residence.

We're NOT in the business of renting out space, but we DO want to support groups whose mission and purpose are in line with ours.

St Alban's will have to find its own way

to be part of the connections that are already here

and the potential connections that are springing up around us.

I'm also looking forward to talking about what it means to delve more deeply into our faith, to articulate what we believe

and what it means for us to believe those things.

Using the mobius strip analogy from last week,

what happens on the hill

feeds into what happens off the hill,

and what happens off the hill

feeds into what happens on the hill.

There are not two sides, there is just one.

Strengthening one requires strengthening the other.

Looking through the eyes of Paul helps us see that truth.

This takes us to today's gospel, to where I started this sermon,

with Christ as the guest in our midst.

Before I continue, I want to take a poll.

Raise your hand if you see yourself in Martha.

Raise your hand if you see yourself in Mary.

Raise your hand if you can't decide.

Just to be fair, I will tell you my answer.

I ... have always seen myself in Martha.

As a type A older sibling,

I've always had a soft spot for her sense of responsibility...

and for her resentment

of the younger sibling who seems to do no wrong

and can just coast along.

As an enneagram Two with a strong One wing,
I'm a helper who has a strong sense of what's fair and right.
I'm all about proactively meeting the needs I perceive,
and I get frustrated
when I think other people aren't doing their part.

So, as you might imagine,
I get really defensive of Martha whenever I read this story.
Historically,
the images of Martha doing the work and Mary sitting at Jesus' feet
have been used to contrast a life of action
against a life of contemplation,
with the "better part" being a life of contemplation.

I get so protective of Martha
I end up buying into that false binary,
When I'm drawn into that debate,
I lose sight of what this story is about.

Before I continue, I want to make it clear. When it comes to the life of study and the life of practice, the life of contemplation and the life of action, **separating them creates a false dichotomy.**

There aren't two sides;
there is just the one.

Back to Jesus as guest.
The image of the invisible God has come among us;
the firstborn of all creation is sitting in the living room.

When Martha saw Jesus as guest,
she saw him through the eyes of an ancient Middle Eastern host.
She had invited him into HER house, he was HER guest.

Growing up in her particular cultural context,
the mental checklist
for how hosts were supposed to offer hospitality to their guests was
ingrained in her mind.

Once he walked through the door,
her body probably started moving automatically around the house
to check off each item on the list.

When Mary saw Jesus as guest, she saw a guest unlike any other guest.
This isn't just because she wasn't technically the host,
though given her position as the younger sister,
she probably should have helped.

But when Jesus is guest, hospitality looks different.
As the opening prayer reminds us,

welcoming Jesus looks like being alert to his presence
and being attentive to his voice.

Don't get me wrong, Jesus would have appreciated something to drink and something to eat, but he wasn't there for food and drink.

Jesus is no ordinary guest.

We welcome Jesus into our lives and our homes
not just because he can teach us how to live a good and moral life.

We follow Jesus because he is the firstborn of all creation
and because it is through him
that we are reconciled to God and to all things,
whether on earth or in heaven.

These days,
it's hard enough
to be reconciled to other people in the same school district
and the same state.

How can we be reconciled to all the things?

As Jesus told Martha, "There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

We start with the only thing we need, Jesus.

This is the better part that will not be taken away from us,
as long as we remain alert to his presence
and attuned to his words.

As I learned in the practice of Centering Prayer,
every time I turn away,
it is not a failure on my part but a gift from God,
because turning away
gives me the opportunity to turn back.

We find a way to focus on the one thing here,
in our corner of creation in South Austin.

A church is different. It's not just another philanthropic, or social or charitable organization because our eyes are on the cross,
our eyes are on Jesus.

Because we are alert to the presence of Jesus,
we strengthen connections we have made
and look for places
to create connections we have yet to make.

Because we are attentive to the words of Jesus,
we know that we aren't following him for our own benefit, and we
aren't following him because he makes us comfortable,
but because he will challenge us
to see and do things differently
the way he did Martha.

whispers loudly and I'd like to think

he encouraged Mary
to help out a little more around the house too.

Jesus is our One Thing.

Therefore we turn to the words of God over and over
so that we might have new eyes to see what we haven't seen before,
to look at the world and see what God is calling us to be and do.

Jesus is our one thing,
so we come to this table not just for solace,
but for strength,
not just for pardon, but for renewal.

May the grace of this Holy Communion make us one
body, one spirit in Christ,
that we may worthily serve the world in his name.³

Amen.

¹ A Prayer Book for Australia (1995) alt. from Alternative Collects for Years A, B & C for the Revised Common Lectionary and Seasonal Prayers Over the Gifts and After Communion

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/16/world/webb-images-science-newsletter-wt-scn/index.html>

³ Eucharistic Prayer C, BCP 372