Homily – Repotting Christ
Rob Keim
November 20, 2022 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church

At our house plants often do a lot better in pots than they do in the ground. There are many days that it feels like we breed gophers and ground squirrels. We have a lot of them, and serious gardeners are also serious about getting rid of gophers and ground squirrels. But we are tender-hearted, and don't to like kill the critters, so they end up eating most of our plants, unless we put them in gopher baskets or in pots. And, the pots work quite well at protecting the plants from critters. They work well until they don't.

Sometimes a plant grows large enough that it becomes root bound in the pot, and the best thing to do is to repot the plant. Take it out of a small pot and plant it with some fresh soil in a bigger pot. When repotting you can tell that the plant has become root bound because the roots are in a big circular whuzzle, filling all parts of the pot with a tangle of roots. And, as you repot you must carefully loosen the tangle without breaking the roots. Keeping the plant in the small pot will stunt its growth, but breaking the roots while repotting will kill the plant. One must take care when repotting.

And, today I want repot our concept of Christ the King. I want to help you take any concept you have about Jesus as King, and I want to repot it into a larger pot that will help you flourish in your spiritual journey. Repotting must be done with care for the roots of your spiritual journey must not be broken but instead made anew by a bigger concept of Christ.

Jesus Christ is at the center of our Christian spirituality. Who we think Jesus is, what we think he did two thousand years ago, and how he fits into the Holy Trinity all shape our theology and by extension our spiritual journeys. When we think of Jesus as loving and kind, that shapes our spiritual journeys. When we think of Jesus as stern and punishing, that shapes our journeys. When we think of Jesus as overcoming violence and death, that too shapes our spiritual journeys. What we think of Jesus, and by extension God, is very important for it shapes our lives as individuals, and it shapes our society.

Starting in the eighteenth century, the human story of Jesus has been the focus of much attention, sometimes at the expense of the divinity of Jesus. This has shaped our spirituality in good ways and in some not so good ways. As we have focused on the human side of Jesus we have been able to better understand how he lived, two thousand years ago, and we have a better understanding of the political and social forces that shaped his life and death. When we focus on the human side of Jesus we

have been able to use him as a role model for better living, and some would say, better dying. And, when we focus on the humanity of Jesus, we have been encouraged to develop a personal relationship with the Jesus.

Now today, on the last Sunday of our liturgical year, and before we start Advent next week, we have our annual celebration of Christ the King. For me, this is not a day in which we remember that Jesus was king. Doing that would actually contradict much of what we know from the Bible. During his lifetime, and even after his resurrection, Jesus refused to be king. Seeing Jesus as King is the old small pot.

For me, Christ the King Sunday is a time when we add back in the divine side of Jesus and more specifically, we remember the second part of the Holy Trinity that we call Christ. The word Christ means "the anointed one". Two thousand years ago, Jewish theology held that the Christ, the anointed one, would come to save the Hebrew people from the oppressors. And for the Apostle Paul, as well as many early Christians, this is just what Jesus had done. He saved the people and took on the title of Christ.

Now, for many of us, Christ has become the last name of Jesus – Jesus Christ. And, sometimes we use the name Jesus to mean the human side and Christ to mean the divine side. It can be hard to conceive of the human-divine combination, so we distinguish the two sides with two different names – Jesus/human, Christ/divine.

However, there is another understanding of Christ that I have found to be meaningful in my own spiritual journey. I'm going to call this understanding the Cosmic Christ. Somehow God existed, or was, even before the creation of the universe and outside the start of time itself. I don't understand it, and never will, however, I cling to an unprovable and unexplainable belief that God predates everything.

I also cling to the unprovable and unexplainable belief in the Holy Trinity. You know that three in one or one in three things. And, for me the second part or facet or person of the Holy Trinity is the Cosmic Christ.

Back in the thirteenth century, Franciscan philosopher and theologian John Duns Scotus taught that the Cosmic Christ was the very "first idea" in the mind of God. In other words, God wanted to manifest the Godself externally, so an eternal love affair could begin with the joining of spirit and matter. This divine love affair, eventually called "the Cosmic Christ," has been unfolding and manifesting since the beginning of time. Jesus came as its personification a mere 2000 years ago. Maybe this was when human consciousness was finally mature enough for a face-to-face encounter.

Now, Jesus is the living embodiment of the Cosmic Christ. And if the Cosmic Christ is infinite, then no understanding of this second person of the Trinity fully encapsulates this reality. Jesus, however, is a finite point of reality which opens the door to knowledge of infinite reality, and thus "knowing Jesus" means a glimpse into the second person of the Trinity. And through Jesus we can understand that the Cosmic Christ is the perfect union between an infinite God and finite creation. In other words, the Cosmic Christ is the flawless joining of matter and spirit and two thousand years ago, the baby Jesus is the complete joining of human and divine.

Now, if your head isn't spinning enough, let me throw out a provocative statement. It is formally and theologically incorrect to say that "Jesus is God." I say it all the time, but it is actually incorrect to say that "Jesus is God." It is more accurate to say that Jesus is the perfect union of "very God" with "very man." Jesus is not God and Jesus is not human, he is a third thing. He is the perfect union of God and human.

When we focus on the Cosmic Christ that is revealed to us through Jesus, we see that within this vast universe of ours, matter and spirit should not be separated. Spirit is forever captured in matter, and matter is the place where Spirit shows itself. This bigger, more cosmic view of Christ has profound implications on us, because as I said earlier, our view of Jesus and our view of God shapes us and shapes our society.

Here are three ways in which repotting with the Cosmic Christ can reshape us. First, Christians often focus on the sinful nature of humans and the flaws within creation. However, this theological doctrine of "original sin" has run its course, and the Cosmic Christ can help us refocus instead on the theological doctrine of "original beauty." At the beginning of time, matter and spirit were joined together in Christ in a beautiful way. Christ is not a plan-B to fix things that have gone wrong, but was there from the beginning. The Cosmic Christ invites us beyond the negative notion of history as being a "fall from grace." Instead, we can hold the long and positive view of history as a slow emergence or evolution into ever-greater consciousness. Furthermore, when we see the perfect union of matter and spirit in Jesus, we can dare to imagine and grow into the same union for ourselves. When we focus on beauty instead of ugliness it shapes us and shapes our culture.

Here is a second implication of the Cosmic Christ. As we survey our world and universe we can see the Cosmic Christ mirrored in every aspect of creation, from elements, to weather, planets, animals, and even stars. We can also see this Cosmic Christ in others including non-Christians, and even enemies. For you see when we love and serve the Eternal Christ and not just the historical Jesus, then there is no gap between sacred and secular. It is one sacred and "supernatural" world. Everywhere there is the perfect joining of matter and spirit.

And, when we see Christ in all things and in all people this has a profound impact on how we steward creation and walk hand-in-hand with all of humanity. Putting the Cosmic Christ back into Christianity along with a Jesus who is both human and divine, will change our world in a beautiful and positive way. Also, the health and survival of our planet and all its inhabitants may depend upon recognizing the inherent sacredness of the world around us.

Here is a third implication of the Cosmic Christ. The mystery of the Cosmic Christ is much bigger than Christianity. And if we don't accept that, we're going to have little ability to make friends, build bridges, or respect anybody other than ourselves. Jesus did not come to create an elite country club with an arbitrary list of requirements for who's in and who's out. Jesus came to reveal something that has always been true everywhere—for everyone—and for all time. Jesus came to reveal the Cosmic Christ. The God many Christians worship is far too small. God is not and never has been a "tribal" God, somewhere "out there," belonging only to Judaism or Christianity. Is it any wonder that so many educated, postmodern people have given up on such a tribal God? This God is not nearly as big as science is discovering the universe itself to be. Our Cosmic God is as big as the universe and can't be contained in a small container.

In the small pot we focus on Jesus as a human king. In the new bigger pot Jesus is our window into the Cosmic Christ. Jesus is both human and divine.

In the small pot we see God only in church, but in the bigger pot the Cosmic Christ is the combination of spirit and matter that is in all and around including, including all people. All of creation is sacred.

In the old pot we have a tribal God who is only for a few. When we repot, God is for all people, let me repeat, all people.

So, on this Christ the King Sunday let us celebrate and embrace our Cosmic Christ.