



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Christ the King of Hope  
November 20, 2016  
The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

There is a fable type story that comes from India, called *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. The best version I found is in poem form.

It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approached the Elephant,  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side,  
At once began to bawl:  
"God bless me! but the Elephant  
Is very like a WALL!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,  
Cried, "Ho, what have we here,  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me 'tis mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a SPEAR!"

The Third approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,  
Thus boldly up and spake:  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a SNAKE!"



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The Fourth reached out an eager hand,  
And felt about the knee  
"What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain," quoth he:  
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant  
Is very like a TREE!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,  
Said: "E'en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most;  
Deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an Elephant  
Is very like a FAN!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun  
About the beast to grope,  
Than seizing on the swinging tail  
That fell within his scope,  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong!

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Needless to say, I bring you this today because I am convinced that this is the state and condition of our relationships within our nation, in many families and even in this congregation. Everyone has their own experience of being an American. Those experiences are formed by many things; certainly our families, the culture in which we grew up and live, gender, race, religion, education, media...they are all the part of the elephant that we touch. The greater reality is that what we touch and see and most importantly feel, is not the same as that of others. We would like it to be, because then everything would be simple. If everyone had the exact same experience of being an American, we wouldn't have the conflict that we have today. So, what do we do now? It feels to me that we've stumbled into an episode of the old Star Trek. We all been beamed off of our starships and put in an arena with Klingons and Romulans and some powerful beings are entertained by our fighting with each other. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a hero to come and save us from ourselves?

Which brings us to today...Christ the King Sunday. This old language of king and kingdom conjures up a time when the world wasn't so complicated, at least it didn't seem that way. The king was the one who was the strongest, the most cunning, and occasionally, the wisest. That is until someone new came along and threw him off of the throne. The king was rarely seen by the common people, he lived in a castle, Peter and I visited a lot of those this summer. They are stark reminders of the perpetual state of conflict that humanity has yet to escape. So the idea of "King" has left a less than sweet taste in my mouth now when I say the word king on Christ the King Sunday. It just doesn't sound like something that I want to attribute to Christ. As much as I would love to see Jesus ride in on his white cloud to rescue us from ourselves, I doubt that that's his plan. He never was or ever will be that kind of a king.

I've finally gotten around to reading Diana Butler Bass's most recent book *Grounded*. In her introduction, she offers insight into something important that is happening within Christianity. In Jesus' time and for a long time afterwards, the universe was understood to be divided into three realms, heaven, the world, and the underworld. Heaven and God were up at a great distance. Hell was a little too close for comfort. The world was stuck in middle. The church inserted itself in between the world and Heaven, to act as an intermediary, interpreter and gatekeeper. God was far away and the church told us what God was like.

However, it wasn't always that way in all places. Celtic Christianity held onto a very critical difference. If Christ was thought of as King it was as the King of the Elements. Christ was, and is, King of the things that make up our world, earth, water, air, and fire. The world is the throne of this king. God's holiness, God's divinity, is found everywhere. The prayers of the Celtic people went something like this:

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You are the peace of all things calm  
You are the place to hide from harm  
You are the light that shines in dark  
You are the heart's eternal spark  
You are the door that's open wide  
You are the guest who waits inside  
You are the stranger at the door  
You are the calling of the poor  
You are my Lord and with me still  
You are my love, keep me from ill  
You are the light, the truth, the way  
You are my Saviour this very day.

Diana Butler Bass talks about farmers who have such a connection to the soil, to its holy and life giving qualities. Their work, planting, tending and harvesting, can be worship for God is found in the growing of things. This kind of experience of God in the soil, the water, the air and all that is is called panentheism, a term that means "God in all things and all things in God." It challenges us think of God not as a being, certainly not a kingly one on a distant throne who might drop by sometime, but as a pervasive holy presence in everything, in every rock and sunset, earthworm and volcano, in the molecules of every liberal and conservative.

So how does this kind of a God help us when we are in the arena hacking away at our opponents?" How does this kind of a God help us to accept that there are other parts to the elephant? How does this kind of a God help us now? I think that we have an important answer in the Eucharist as it was imagined. Coming together and sharing this meal is meant to make us one. It is so lovely and yet in this case, it is incomplete because we come to the table, we get our food, and we leave. We don't do the thing that Jesus imagined, which was to sit at the table together and talk. That's the magic of breaking bread together. But even that is not enough right. I'm sure that there are families all over this country who are dreading Thanksgiving because of the political bickering that happens when the family comes together.

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It may seem hopeless, but if Christ is the King of anything, he is the King of Hope. There is a path through this and we can learn it. It takes developing some skills, being willing to look up from our electronic sources of information and false connection and listen and share from our hearts. We need conversation, not alternating talking points, but real listening and a willingness to hear of someone else's experience. There are boundaries around such conversations, no insults or name calling, no preconceptions about what someone else feels. But an honest sharing of what we value and what we need. It is an important step toward our exit from the arena. If we can look at our opponent and remind ourselves that God is in their molecules, perhaps we can begin to create a better future together. If we do this, we might glimpse the King in our midst – Christ the King of conversation and communion.

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