

Friday Message from Pastor Pook for December 18, 2020

Good morning, everyone. This is December 18th. Welcome to our weekly message. We're so glad you've joined us. Now, last week we talked about several of the symbols that we see on our trees during this Advent and Christmas season. The official name for them is called Chrismons and they are meant to point to Christ. They're meant to be explanations of who Jesus is and a little bit about what we believe about Him and what He does for us as a community. And so we have a few more images that we'd like to let you know of.

First off here, we have a set of keys. Now in Isaiah 22:22, he says "On His shoulder, the key of the House of David will be placed." So it's a symbol that the opening up of David, what David was intended to do is represented by these keys, that Jesus is going to open up the message of salvation. The point of the kingship of David and the fulfillment of all of his descendants, and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses, and everybody else, is that Jesus is the key. Now also later on, as He goes in His ministry, Jesus says, "I give you the keys of the Kingdom." And that is a specific reference to Peter and all the disciples and by extension all of the pastors following after them, that whoever's sins you forgive on earth are forgiven in heaven, and whoever's sins you retain on earth will be retained in heaven. In other words, God has given the authority to forgive sins for a group, for a flock of people, to the pastors. And that is why we have this confession and absolution as the major part of our beginning at every Divine Service, where we hear the Word of God, and we have an opportunity to confess our sins and to receive the forgiveness from the pastor as the voice of God, as the mouthpiece of God. So that we know that forgiveness comes directly from God because of the pastor has declared it to be true. Now, one of the things that we don't practice very often, although it's a wonderful practice and I highly encourage it, is private confession and absolution. To come to me as an individual and to speak to me and confess your sins so that you might hear the absolution by name and for the specific sins that are plaguing you. Now, this is often done when we are struggling with sins that we just can't seem to get hold of, or we can't seem to shake. This is a wonderful opportunity to come before the pastor and to hear that absolution to us as individuals. It's nothing that I would lord over you or hold over you. It's nothing that you have to do. It's just another opportunity where God gives us His grace and the assurance of His forgiveness. He's over-abundant in His blessings of assurance that our sins are forgiven. One of them is to have the pastor be able to speak directly to us and declare that our individual sins that we have named ourselves are indeed forgiven by God. What a blessing that is.

Now, another symbol that you might often see on the tree and elsewhere is the symbol of an anchor. And this really does come from Hebrews 6:19-20. That Christ is a sure and steadfast anchor for our souls. Now, what does an anchor do? An anchor digs into the ground and hold a ship in place so that it is not blown away by the winds or the storm that is going on. So to see Christ as this anchor that holds us firm when the cares of this world consume us, when the frustration and the worry and the doubt and the anxiety plague us, we can go to our sure and steadfast anchor and know that we will not be moved. Not because of our strength, but because of His grace and mercy and His strength that He has already dealt with all the fears of this world, He has dealt with sin, death and the devil. And so we don't need to be afraid. So this is the anchor that which we hold fast to, you might almost say it's equivalent to the rock that Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," that confession and that confidence holds us firm and keeps us in place as a good strong anchor does.

Now, getting back into our Greek because you can't leave out Greek. Here's another symbol that you might often see the Alpha and the Omega. And these are the capital letters of the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. And that comes also from the scriptures and you will hear that in Revelation 1:8 where He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." He is the beginning. Before the beginning, there was God and after, there is God. He is the one who is, who was, and who will be the same forever and ever. Amen. So the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, again another symbol that recognizes the nature of God. And because Christ Jesus is God, He is the Alpha and Omega as well. He is God Himself.

Now another symbol that doesn't have a specific scripture reference necessarily, is the harp. The harp is a symbol again, of being the Son of David. David was a shepherd and while he was tending to his sheep, he often wrote poetry and used the harp to accompany him. And many of those poems that he wrote and put together are what we now have in the book of Psalms. And so this harp represents the concept that Jesus is the Son of David. The one of whom David says, "The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand." This is a true offspring of Abraham and the true descendant of King David, the King of not only Israel, but of all creation. And so the harp is that representation that connects us again with the Old Testament back to King David.

And then finally the ship, at least for this week. The ship is often a symbol of the church. In fact, many of the older churches are often shaped like a ship where the front end of it goes up like the bow of a boat and it's meant to represent and symbolize a ship or a boat. And it is the place where we all dwell together in safety. That imagery of Noah in the Ark that God saves them while they are on the ark. And Jesus in the boat, in the sea of Galilee, when He calms the storm, when His disciples are in it. All of that imagery connects us with when we are in this boat, this structure, or this community which is the church then we are safe and secure in Christ, of course represented by the cross upon the sail. And so this is a reminder that we find Christ, we find our community, and we find our hope in the church where the Word of God is proclaimed, where the message of the Alpha and Omega and the keys to the kingdom are shared, where the sacraments are given in the right way. So the boat, and then of course, the nautical theme with the anchor. How is the boat held secure? It is held secure by Christ, the anchor. The church is held secure by Christ as well. So those two symbols often go together.

So hopefully that was again, a good lesson that you enjoyed and learned from about the symbols of our church. A lot of times you will see these symbols, not just on the Christmas tree, but very often you'll see them on the paraments, on the colored cloth that we have on our altar and pulpit and lectern, baptismal font, and in the banners of the church. Sometimes you'll see them even carved into the altars and those other areas as well. All of these symbols are often used in many different ways to remind us of who Christ is and who God is.

Just a reminder that this coming week, we have a Wednesday service at 5:00 and that is our last Advent service. We also have Christmas Eve services at 4:30 and 7:00 and they're both the same, so come to either one and it'll be carols and hymns and scripture readings ending, of course with Silent Night and the candlelight service. So please come and join us for either the 4:30 or the 7:00 service on Christmas Eve. And then also Christmas day, we have a 10:30 Divine Service with communion to celebrate the Christ, the nativity of our Lord. And so we invite you to come to all of that. We look forward to the opportunity of seeing you face-to-face. I pray that everybody is safe and well, and I pray that this new year brings peace and joy and comfort, that peace which surpasses all understanding from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.