

## **EASTER SUNDAY MORNING: APRIL 21, 2019**

Recently I watched a video of a talk by Janet Mackenzie. Who is Janet Mackenzie? First of all, she is a very beautiful, humble woman whose integrity and simplicity are striking. Janet grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and now lives in the northern kingdom of upstate Vermont. She is an artist, a painter.

In the year 2000, Janet entered a competition that required a depiction of Jesus Christ for the new millennium. She was one of 1700 artists who submitted a painting. She won first place. She titled her painting, "Jesus of the People." As you look at her figure of Jesus, you perk up and question, is this an androgynous Jesus? No, it definitely leans to the feminine. And Jesus is dark-skinned, in fact has negroid features. The painting created a sensation. Janet appeared on the Today Show on television and featured her work. As a result, she started to get hate letters, threats of violence, accusations of blasphemy. "How dare you dabble with the historical facts of Jesus the Galilean?"

A group of evangelicals organized a bus ride to come up and picket her home. Her Vermont neighbors, rural folk, were ready to come to her protection and were ready to surround the house with their shotguns. Janet says that God must have a sense of humor. For the day of planned protest, Vermont had a blizzard.

I think Janet had a profound insight into who the Risen Christ is. She wanted ordinary people, poor people, black people, female people to identify with Jesus. The Risen Christ, as Paul writes, is neither male or female, black or white, but is the universal Christ present in everyone and in everything. The Risen Christ breaks all barriers of time and space and is present in the entire cosmos, which is the body of Christ. The Risen Christ is present in this gathering and in the bread and wine.

Now, if we can see that the Risen Christ is in everyone and everything and that they are in Christ, I must recognize that Christ dwells in me and I in Christ. I cannot be separate from Christ, from God. Separation from God, from family, from community, from people, from nature is the source of sin. I may be able to separate myself in my mind but God will not separate from me. Relationship is the nature of God and of the universe.

In today's reading from the letter to the Colossians, we heard "So, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above..." It does not say, "...you

will be raised with Christ” but “you have been raised with Christ.” We are already in the Risen Christ and the Christ is in us.

We made our covenant with Christ when we were baptized. In a few minutes we will renew our baptismal commitment, the sign of the completion of our efforts in Lent to come closer to Christ, to seek the things that are above. We renounce the powers of darkness and choose to live in the light, to let the Risen Christ be real in our lives.

The culture that surrounds us is full of the powers of darkness.

- We are surrounded by violence that is expressed in our thoughts, in our words, our actions; in how we treat others or look down on others. The Risen Christ breathes non-violence, respect, forgiveness.
- We are surrounded by greed that is expressed in possessiveness, in consumption of the world’s resources, a consumeristic mentality that always wants more. The Risen Christ breathes simplicity, sharing, harmony with nature and all creation.
- We are surrounded by arrogance and pride that sets one group against another. The Risen Christ breathes oneness with all that exists.
- We are surrounded by a throw-away culture that throws away not only things, but people, young and old. The Risen Christ breathes in all people and things and calls for reverence and respect.

Am I willing to renounce these powers and seek the things that are above where Christ dwells in God? Easter is a day we celebrate because we believe Christ has conquered the powers of darkness and lives in us so we can also choose the light.

Take time today to look at each other, your family, your friends, as well as strangers you meet. Can you see the Risen Christ in them? Like Janet Mackenzie, broaden your vision and imagination to see the Christ in all you see, hear, and touch this Easter day.

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