



**“DWELLING STRONG”**  
**SCRIPTURE: COLOSSIANS 1: 11-20**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**Sunday, November 20, 2022**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

Colossians 1: 11-20

1:11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from God’s glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully

1:12 giving thanks to God, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

1:13 God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of Christ,

1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1:15 Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

1:16 for in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through Christ and for Christ.

1:17 Christ is before all things, and in Christ all things hold together.

1:18 Christ is the head of the body, the church; Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that Christ might come to have first place in everything.

1:19 For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

1:20 and through Christ God was pleased to reconcile to God’s self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of Christ’s cross.

THE WORD OF THE LORD  
THANKS BE TO GOD.

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This Christ the King Sunday, I am going to be disruptive. Because the King thing is something that we can't seem to unravel in the ways Jesus really wanted us to. I've preached Christ the King sermons for a few decades now, and I always leaned into the message that Jesus was a new kind of king, a disruptive kind of king. That he wasn't the king people wanted.

I believe all that about Jesus' disruption. The problem is we just can't seem to shake the enchantment we have with dominating power out of our psyches. In other words, the word "king" is just too loaded for us, it's just too quickly and closely identified with power over, power that gets its way, that demands its will be done. We talk about God that way all the time. We talk about Jesus that way all the time.

We take Jesus' disruption of king and we dress it all back up with the swords that he tried to beat into plowshares.

It is hard for me to read this passage in Colossians without the weight of 1500 years of Christian triumphalism. It's hard for me to read all the ways Jesus is supreme and better and the only, and the beginning and the end, and not feel the tentacles of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism taking Jesus down from the cross and dividing up the spoils of his embodiment of divine love.

It's hard for me to read this passage through the lens of liberation because of all the violence and oppression that Christianity has sanctioned and deployed in God's name and in Jesus' name—acting like domination is the way of the one who came to save us from our self-destructive obsession with hierarchies and dominating power.

These have not been an easy few weeks for our community. We are shaken by the untimely death of Roslyn Carney, by the suddenness of how life changes when death comes—so many in our midst are in deep grief—the Hill Family, Madge Francis' family, the Griffith/Meacham/Rosal/Legerton Family, my own family. And our grief is mirrored in a world awash in the grief of mass extinction and layers of pandemics, and economies that tell us our well-being is not a going concern, our well-being is not more important than profit and consumption that ends up benefitting so few.

These are wearying times. And life on earth has been taxing—that's why Jesus came in his disruption in the first place. He showed us the power of compassion, the power of righteous anger, the power of connection, the power of mutuality and reciprocity, the power of being trustworthy in life's intractable vulnerability, the power of love.

I can't preach another sermon about the new kind of king. It's too dangerous to do that with the likes of us—we're too susceptible, too prone to falling under the spell again that Jesus will solve our problems with force, with might, with violence, with enforcing his will.

I can't preach another sermon about any kind of king. There is too much we have already lost. Too many harmed by our intoxication with being right, too many brutalized by a white male God who will make you pay if you do not obey.

The artifact of this letter to the Colossians has shards of possibility. We must handle them with care. We must let them refract meaning to us through the experiences of the truth of liberation.

This week the world lost a prophet, someone who changed the landscape of feminist theology, someone who listened to the troubling in her soul that would not let her settle for the patriarchy and white supremacy so endemic to Christianity in America.

**(put up picture of Delores Williams)**

Delores Williams, Professor Emerita of Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York, died this week.

**(Put up picture of book cover of *Sisters in the Wilderness*)**

Her first book, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, came out just a couple of years before I started my PhD in Religious Studies at Emory.<sup>1</sup> I wrote one of my comprehensive exams on Delores Williams' work. Her prophetic disruption has deeply shaped not only my work, but my imagination and my call as a preacher, pastor, and theologian.

**(Take down picture of book cover of *Sisters in the Wilderness*)**

She can support our disruption today with the power of her theological curiosity and moral courage. She can support our disruption today with the story of how she brought her experience as a black woman to bear on her faith—and how she found freedom in her search for divine love not in the king images that formed her childhood in the church, but in the experiences and truths of black women.

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<sup>1</sup> Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, (Orbis Books, 1993)

Let her proclaim the good news to all of us—not of Jesus’ supremacy, not of Jesus’ maleness, and certainly not of anything about a made up white-Jesus, but the good news of Jesus’ blackness and Jesus’ disruption.

Listen carefully to Dr. Williams now—for where she found Divinity and where she found her identity connected to Divinity. This is a talk she gave at Union Seminary around 2001 about her journey into being a pioneer of womanist theology.<sup>2</sup> This is only part of her talk. It is about 9 minutes. Listen for sparks of recognition for you in the truth she shares.

### **(Delores Williams on womanism video 9:20)**

What did you hear that spoke to you? (get some feedback)

- Jesus, my brother, Jesus, my brother—Delores Williams
- Mutuality in relationships; Equality
- The blackness of God
- Searching for divinity
- A divinity a black woman could accept.
- White folks and us both Christians but we ain't got the same religion.
- Correlation between black woman’s experience and
- Womanist the pluralization of feminism.
- Black Christian women’s leadership. Womanism a variety of feminism, brought Delores Williams together with religion. I am a black woman and I will be.
- Examining the conditioning that shaped her.
- It’s a great life if you don’t weaken.

Delores Williams described the problem with monarch metaphors in the hands of white people as “demonarchy.”

**“Demonarchy can be understood as the demonic governance of black women’s lives by white male and white female ruled systems using racism, violence, violation, [deprivation], and death as instruments of social control.” ~Delores S. Williams, *The Color of Feminism: Or Speaking the Black Woman’s Tongue***

As we begin the spiritual practice of Advent next week, Advent as a time of reflection, a time of marking and pondering the deep need the world stands in of God’s radical love to truly be with us, in the flesh, let us loosen our hold on the king images that have helped to form us in our faith. When we make room for incarnation this year, may we make room for dwelling in the strength of our brother, our sister, our sibling the Christ—the one who

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<sup>2</sup> Delores Williams video <https://youtu.be/hltJqzbXPFI>

sought deeper relationship and mutuality, the one whose hunger for justice took him to the margins of society—only there can we truly find freedom’s full strength and promise.

“For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

Thanks be to God.