

Consensus

Volume 26
Issue 2 *Apocalyptic*

Article 9

11-1-2000

The pursuing Christ

Nancy Vernon Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Nancy Vernon (2000) "The pursuing Christ," *Consensus*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol26/iss2/9>

This Sermons is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The Pursuing Christ

Nancy Vernon Kelly

*Pastor, St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Kitchener, Ontario*

Text: Matthew 25:31-46 (A – Reign of Christ)

In the Kitchener bus terminal, there is a warning posted that says this: “You may be approached by a person requesting money to purchase a bus ticket to Toronto or another destination. The reasons given may seem plausible, and sometimes they are. However, more often than not, shortly after you leave, the ticket will be handed in for a refund. We suggest that if you wish to purchase a ticket on behalf of another person, that you ask us to make the ticket non-refundable.”

In the Kitchener Bus Terminal, one cold morning, I was approached by a stranger while I was waiting for the bus to Toronto. I was sipping a cup of tea and reading a book. The warning sign was posted where I could see it when I noticed the stranger there beside me – a young Muslim woman with dark skin and her head covered.

I spotted her when I sat down beside her, but soon, even without looking at her, I sensed that she was as aware of my presence as I was of hers. I turned to greet her with a nod, and she responded with a smile. She was much younger than I – about the same age as my daughters. So many differences, I thought. And wondered if perhaps she could be thinking the same thing.

I wondered if she could be from Somalia, like my neighbours, but I was reluctant to start a conversation. It turned out that she wasn't as reluctant as I was because before long she asked me a one word question. “Toronto?” she said. And I responded, “Yes. What about you?”

"I don't know," she answered, and I thought that was certainly a peculiar response. Why was she waiting at the bus terminal if she didn't know where she was going? Uneasily, I remembered the warning on the sign and wondered if she was about to ask me to buy her a bus ticket so that she could ask for a refund.

There was quite a pause while she seemed to be thinking something over. And when she asked me, "How much?" I began to put together a story and supposed that maybe she really did want to go to Toronto but didn't have enough money for the fare. When I told her how much I paid for my ticket, she sort of winced.

And then there was a long silence. The ball was in my court again. Although it surely must have appeared as though I was dropping it like a hot potato, what was really going on was that I was having a conversation with myself. One voice inside my head was saying, "Okay. Go ahead. Give her the fare. You have enough cash. And remembering today's Gospel lesson – Behold, the Christ at your side." And at the same time another voice was putting up quite an argument. That voice was saying, "No. Don't do it. She's panhandling. Money won't help. She needs much more than the fare to Toronto. She needs somebody to do an assessment and find out what her real problem is."

And while the voices in my head continued to argue like this: "Yes, go ahead and do it. No, don't do it", I noticed that the woman had begun to stare at the book in my lap. Her presence was beginning to bother me. She was making it impossible for me to ignore her. And what was the big deal anyway with my book?

It was a big relief when the call came over the loud speaker: "Toronto bus boarding on Platform A." In haste,

without looking the stranger in the eye,
ignoring that warning on the sign and my own good sense,
I pulled a bill out of my purse,
passed it from my hand to hers,
boarded the bus quickly,
and sat down in my usual seat next to the window.

I was thinking, "That's that! Now I can relax, think a little, sleep a little."

But that wasn't that. As soon as I settled in, I found myself wondering. Was the stranger going to buy a ticket and board the bus? Or would she disappear down King Street and wait for a market to open to buy some food?

And while I was certain that I wouldn't ever see her again and at the same time watching for her to appear on the bus, **there she was!** At the last minute, she climbed aboard, handed the driver a ticket, and made her way down the aisle, searching the faces of all the passengers as if she were looking for someone she knew.

Of course, she sat down in the empty seat next to me, and I began to regard her with some expectation. This stranger Christ was going to draw close to me and travel along beside me. She wasn't done with me yet. She was determined to say something more to me. At first I wondered if she'd come to thank me. But clearly that wasn't it. She had something else on her mind.

Her English was limited to the basics, and she was determined to engage me in conversation using whatever means she had available to her. While I looked confused, she started pointing down to my bag, and I wondered if she remembered my book. And so I pulled it out of my bag and asked her if that's what she meant.

She nodded, meaningfully, only her meaning was still hidden from me.

Then this stranger, this neighbour, this Christ, reached over and traced the sign of the cross that was embossed on the cover of my book. I thought I understood what she was trying to say – something like: “I see you're a Christian, and surely you can see that I'm not. We're world's apart – you and I – and we both know it.”

But while I was coming up with a list of what made up the gaping wound between us – skin colour, language, religion, age, culture – not to mention the differences I've heard about in the role of women in her culture and mine – she was doing something else.

She started nodding and smiling as she continued to trace the sign of the cross on my book. She was clear about what she wanted to say to me, but I was still in the dark and needed some simple words to help me make the connection. Gladly she gave me those words – surprising words – words that came to me completely from outside myself.

“Same Father,” she said, still tracing the sign of the cross on my book, playing havoc with my religious categories and giving new power to old words. “Same Father,” this Muslim woman said. There I was concentrating on our differences while all the time she had been linking us together under one roof, in one household, in one family, with the same parents.

“Same,” she said – which means alike, not so different after all. And “Father,” the old-fashioned – now sometimes out of favour (even by me) way of talking about God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the One whom Jesus called Our Father. “Same Father.” This neighbour in need, this Christ, who found me in the bus terminal, this one who drew close to me and insisted on travelling along beside me, addressed these simple words to me – Same Father – releasing the powerful connection between us.

Without any effort, we could list many ways that it seems that Christ has abandoned the world. But listen! Jesus is saying something else to us. Christ is coming to us. And Christ is actively pursuing us. Christ is travelling alongside us, intending to bring us completely into his Reign – a place where at last God will heal all the wounds that keep God’s people from being friends. The wounds between the races. The wounds between the rich and the poor. The wounds between people of different faiths.

By grace, every Sunday we gather around Word and Sacrament just like Christians do all over the world. Just once in our lives, sometimes when we’re babies, sometimes when we’re children, sometimes when we’re adults, we receive the waters of Holy Baptism. On that day the sign of the cross is traced on our foreheads – a sign that we belong to Christ forever. On a special day like this one, when some of us after a time of study affirm their baptism, all of us have a chance to remember that we are fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the same heavenly Father.

We need to gather here, to listen and to take the bread and the wine. We need each other. But we are not created to stay put in this place. We’re created to leave this place, and the Good News is that even when we do leave this place, we meet Christ in the needs of our neighbours. I hope you’ll put it in your own terms, but in the terms of my life, Christ pursues us. Christ gets on a bus with us. Christ journeys along beside us, alive and actively trying to heal whatever wounds separate us as God’s

people.

No doubt we are marked with the signs of the times – signs that try to make us reluctant, signs that try to make us afraid. But remember that we are also marked with another sign. In our baptism we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. The sign of the cross sets us apart to go out and encounter the signs of the times.

May Christ continue to pursue us in the needs of our neighbours and to release the power to make us one whole people of God.

Amen.