

# “Christ the King”

Luke 1:68-79 & 23:33-43, Colossians 1:11-20

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One of the great things of the priesthood of all believers is that you inspire and challenge me. Today is Christ the King Sunday. For 13 years, I have had the opportunity to share a sermon on Christ the King based on the scripture of Jesus being crucified which seems so dark for this time of the year; so instead, I have always chosen the Thanksgiving scripture and preached on gratitude. Thanksgiving is a nice safe sermon that gets everyone ready for their Thanksgiving festivities. Do we really want to go to the cross this week? For the last several years one of you has commented, “You have skipped over Christ the King Sunday again.” This comment left me wondering, “What am I missing?” Obviously, today’s scripture and Christ the King is inspiring to this person. I was challenged to meditate upon Christ the King, and I have been inspired.

The early church celebrated Christ the King by pondering how all things are held together by Jesus. They sang a song, “All things have been created through Jesus and for Jesus. Jesus, himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” This song was so popular that the Apostle Paul quoted it. **Colossians 1:11-20 NRSV** “**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 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Jesus 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 Jesus and for Jesus. Jesus, himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Jesus is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Jesus God was pleased to reconcile to Godself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of Jesus’ cross.**

The Ebstorf map illustrates the uniting kingship of Jesus. The original map was 12 feet by 12 feet painted on 30 goatskins sewn together. (A picture of this map is on the bulletin cover.) Christ literally covers this map and holds it all together. At the top is Jesus’ head, the bottom his feet, and the sides his hands. Jerusalem is his navel with the new life of the resurrection depicted by a picture of Jesus leaving the empty tomb. Adam and Eve are shown in the Garden of Eden. Around the map are descriptions of animals and the creation of the world. So from the beginning of time through eternity, from North to South and East to West, all is held together by our King Jesus. Through our King Jesus, God is putting all the cosmos and every person back together.

Ecclesiastes declares God has put eternity in our hearts. Today science has discovered that Laminin holds our cells together. Laminin is the shape of the cross. We are broken people. Sometimes one's life is falling apart. Our King Jesus created every one of our cells to hold together, Jesus is putting our lives back together today. Jesus will bring all together in glory for eternity.

Christ the King Sunday is a threshold Sunday. Today is the final Sunday of the church calendar. Next Sunday we begin a new church year with advent. Christ the King connects all the promises of the Old Testament with the new. We stand in the darkness on the threshold with the light of Jesus about to dawn upon us. The gospel of Luke proclaims. **Luke 1:68-79 NRSV "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for God has looked favorably on God's people and redeemed them. God has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of God's servant David, as God spoke through the mouth of God's holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus God has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered God's holy covenant, the oath that God swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before God all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare God's ways, to give knowledge of salvation to God's people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."** We stand on the threshold living in darkness with the light of Jesus drawing us to the Kingdom of God where all will enjoy glorious eternal light.

The psalmist sings of life on the threshold of the kingdom. **Psalm 46 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; God utters God's voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations God has brought on the earth. God makes wars cease to the end of the earth; God breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; God burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."**

Christ the King Sunday was made an official church feast by the pope who declared no human can rule over the church. Christ is the supreme king. Christ rules over the church and our life. No human, only Christ deserves our allegiance.

Protestants echoed this belief in the Declaration of Barmen. In response to Nazism they wrote. "We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords." We may be influenced by powers and people; however, ultimately Christ is our king. Christ is our supreme truth, authority, and guide.

Christ the King Sunday is a celebration of how Jesus reigned in the darkest moment on the cross. Therefore we can be certain that Christ our king will save us, redeem us, and create paradise out of our darkest moments. Luke explains. **Luke 23:33-43 NRSV** **“When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."**

Jesus reigns even from the cross with all the sins of the world upon him, in the midst of excruciating pain as he is being mocked and humiliated, Jesus still holds all together. Jesus rules with grace, forgiving us from the cross. With the darkest moment of every person of the world, past, present and future upon, Jesus he reigns, conquering all the darkness and welcoming the condemned thief into radiant paradise.

Perhaps when we hear Christ the King we picture Jesus on a majestic throne in heaven shining radiant love into every heavenly-being instead of hanging from a cross upon a rotting trash heap. Perhaps we see Jesus dressed in splendor instead of in a tattered loincloth and bleeding. Should the focus of Christ the King be on resurrection or the cross? Or both? What should we ponder to celebrate our King Christ's victory over every form of death and darkness? A heavenly throne or a bloody cross?

Todd Townshend invited a retired professor to preach on Christ the King Sunday. He was in his thirtieth year of suffering from severe bi-polar. He endured numerous life-threatening bouts with depression. He developed the deepest appreciation for Jesus' light that kept dispersing his darkness. He began his sermon by explaining that the Cross is the most important symbol to him, but he always felt less drawn to empty crosses, or crosses with a "dressed up" Jesus attached to them. The crucifix said everything to him. Todd recalls how he began to squirm, because he always thought a crucifix was a bit much. Jesus is no longer being tortured to death. He is risen. The lay person continued the Cross cannot be empty for me, because Jesus reigns from the Cross. Jesus reigns for me when I am upon my own cross of death and darkness. In those moments, Jesus is most powerful. Jesus is forgiving, proclaiming, reconciling, and suffering with me and for me. Jesus cannot be at a distance when my suffering is about to kill me, and he is not. He went on to tell of several moments when in his worst suffering, he perceived Jesus comforting him from the cross. In these moments when Jesus reigned from the Cross for him, everything was not made "all better." The pain continued, but it was bearable; and he chose to live. As he says, "As Christ was faithful, in Christ I can be faithful, even though I may die from this." In the depths of

our darkest moment we have a king that will hold it all together until our king carries us into the paradise of his kingdom. Todd explains how after the insights from that lay person he now saw Jesus on the Cross as good. Since Jesus reigned from the cross, Jesus reigns from everywhere.

At a Good Friday service a child asked, "Why is this good? It sounds very, very bad." A grandmother answered, "Imagine how big God is, that Jesus, could say 'forgive them' while they crucified him. Imagine how big God's loving heart is, imagine God's reach and just think of what power Jesus has to say to the others who suffer, 'today you will be with me in paradise.' Nothing sounds better to me."

Martha Spong says, "That's the kind of King I want, Jesus the king who gathers the least of us into God's castle: the ones who have made mistakes, the ones who are suffering, the ones who are afraid to die, the ones who have no more reason to live, the ones who hunger and thirst for more than food and water."

Jesus reigned from the cross. Jesus became like you and me. Jesus took on our suffering. Jesus took on our darkest moment. Despite the pain of hatred, the ugliness of sin, the darkness of chaos, the terror of every form of evil, the trickery of the devil, Jesus held it all together. Jesus is conquering all of this. Jesus is reigning with grace, compassion, and forgiveness. Jesus is establishing the Kingdom of God for us. Jesus is carrying us to paradise. Amen.