**Colossians 1:13-20** November 20, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christ the King Sunday

*Colossians 1:13[God the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Christ, A King Who Is All a King Should Be**

If someone would watch you for a while—I would suggest a full week so they can see the entire cycle of your routine—if someone would watch your life for a week, what would they think is the organizing principle of your life? Think about that for a moment. To an impartial observer, what would they think is the reason you do what you do?

That depends on a lot. If you are parents with multiple children between kindergarten and senior year, someone might think that your organizing principle is your children. Everything in life seems to revolve around them—schedules, finances, social contacts. A little older, or with no kids, the organizing principle probably looks like work. Your wake up time is determined by your clock in time. You spend more of your waking hours there than anywhere else. You may cancel plans, even family plans, because your employer needs extra hours from you, but it never goes the other way—telling your employer to cool his heels. Get into retirement age and someone could be forgiven for thinking that your life revolves around your health, what with all the doctors’ visits and financial expenditures on said doctors’ and their prescribed medicines. If you are young, would some think that your friends are your guiding principle, or maybe more to the point, your image? Consider the attention to personal appearance, the clothing and the carefully curated social media look.

What is the organizing principle of your life? What determines what you do?

That may seem a very self-centered start to a sermon on Christ the King Sunday. It is! This should be about Jesus! About *his* honor. About what qualifies *him* as king. Why are we talking about ourselves?

Because how we answer the question I asked reveals the truth about whether or not we actually look at Christ as king. What is the organizing principle of your life? This Sunday is called “Christ the King Sunday.” Is it just a nice sounding phrase we say to persuade ourselves that Jesus is the center of our lives, when in fact he is just a cute bauble dangling from our rear-view mirror? We may claim Christ Jesus as king. But would an outsider ever guess it? If he really is “king,” shouldn’t every surface of our lives bear the stamp of his influence?

Yes it should. We aren’t going to spend too much time today talking about how we make that happen, how we make Jesus the organizing principle of our lives. You see, it’s Christ the King Sunday, and our reading speaks about the things that qualify him as king.

Rather than telling ourselves we need to do better in honoring Jesus and organize our lives around him, let us simply hear what God’s word tells us about Christ Jesus our king. When we have internalized who Jesus is and what he has done, his influence will seep into every corner of our lives.

In this reading, God’s word describes three facets of Jesus Christ that make him special. Two things he is and one thing he does. First, he is the Creator God. Second, he is head of the Church, his people. Third, he is the one who reconciles us with God.

**I.** The book of Colossians has much to say about Jesus. Most of the New Testament books are called Epistles. These are personal letters written to maybe 15 groups of Christians. What is interesting is that nearly every single group of Christians, within years of being founded, had false teachings boiling up in their midst. Satan in the Garden of Eden did not waste time filling Eve’s ears with lies. And he didn’t want God’s people in the early church to hear only the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for long.

Among these Colossians, the false teaching they were wrestling with downplayed Jesus. “Yes, Jesus is important,” so the false teachers said, “but he is just part of the picture. There are other spiritual beings out there. You should know about them, and pay attention to them.” In Colosse the false teachers also stressed the Old Testament ceremonial laws, which in turn downplayed Christ’s saving work. So, add in a few extra spiritual beings and then throw in extra rules and laws, and all of a sudden Jesus really isn’t that important. Oh, sure, Jesus is good, but just one piece of a great big jigsaw puzzle.

Which echoes in our day. Have you ever heard of someone saying, “I’m very spiritual, but not at all religious” which is to say that when it comes to the supernatural they prefer to believe what makes sense to them this week. Think also of the Wiccans with their spirit veneration. Consider the popular “Coexist” bumper stickers which, together with the false teachers in Colosse, say, “Jesus is okay if he’s what you are into. But he is just one little display case in a huge zoo of religious truth.”

But that’s not who or what Christ Jesus is! Not at all. Listen to verses 15-16: ***“[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”*** One little point of explanation there: when you hear the words ***“whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities,”*** those words were Greek ways of referring to ranks of spiritual beings. The Apostle writes that no matter what spiritual beings you honor, even if they are real, they were created by Jesus. He is infinitely superior to them. What are you doing paying them any attention?

**II.** Another facet of Christ Jesus’ kingly authority is stated in verse 18. ***“[Christ Jesus] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.”*** Christ is Lord and king of the entire created order, and in a special way, his people.

But did you hear what Jesus is called when it comes to his relationship with believers? The King of Kings’ relationship to his people is likened to the relation of the head to the body. ***“He is the head of the body, the church”*** is how it is stated. Think about the difference in emphasis between calling Christ our king and our head. The head, the source of thought, directs the body. The two are connected. One cannot go anywhere without the other. Even more, the head is concerned for the body, deeply concerned. I feel a pain, I figure out what I can do to make it better. I get a wound, I treat it, even go for medical treatment. Likewise, the head directs what the body does. My mind tells me when to get up, what I want to do with the day, where I am going to go. Not my foot or my elbow, but my head. It’s almost like God knows that we have trouble thinking of a king who would actually care, and so Jesus is called the head of the gathering of believers.

When we have Christ the King Sunday, it’s good to call Christ King. But here is the interesting thing: as I briefly looked at cross-references, when it comes to describing the believer’s relationship with Jesus, God’s word shies away from king to subject language and instead usually uses parent to child language, or head to body language. Not that it would be wrong, but I believe God’s Word is emphasizing the truly caring rule of Christ in our lives. He is the sort of king that we almost can’t imagine!

**III.**  The other third point our reading makes about Jesus is about what he does.

It states that from the moment life started, every single one of us was in ***“the dominion of darkness.”*** The dominion of darkness, the kingdom of condemnation is a terrible place to be, but it is where we begin our lives. How do we get into another kingdom, Jesus’ kingdom? How do we switch citizenship?

There is an interesting little story from the life of Saint Paul in the book of Acts. One time when Paul was arrested, the Roman soldiers were stretching him out to flog him (remember, they didn’t really have a police force like we do.) Paul asked the soldiers prepping him, *“Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”* Well, no it wasn’t. So the commander was called down. He asked Paul, “Are you really a Roman citizen?” Then the commander added, *“I had to pay a big price for my citizenship”* (Ac 22:25-28). You see, if you weren’t born a Roman citizen, you had to either pay a lot of money or do some outstanding service to the empire. You didn’t just get to be a Roman citizen. Payment of some sort had to be made.

We all started out citizens of the ***“dominion of darkness”*** but God wanted us in ***“the kingdom of the Son he loves”*** (13). But how? We can’t just show up and claim citizenship. Like for that Roman officer, a price had to be paid. ***“[God the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** Clearly stated, what brings us into Jesus’ kingdom, what pays the price, is Jesus’ work of redemption and forgiveness. Go farther down to verse twenty and you hear that God’s great plan for humanity is reconciliation, to be brought back together with God. There again, that reconciliation between us sinners and God is 100% credited to Jesus who made ***“peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”***

The Bible does not say our chief problem is poverty and Jesus will make us wealthy. The Bible does not say our chief problem is disease and Jesus will make us healthy. The Bible does not say our chief problems are the accidents and tragedies that destroy lives and that Jesus will keep all the bad stuff from happening. A lot of people think that. The Bible does not.

We can be healthy, wealthy, and living the American dream, but without forgiveness we stay where we started, in ***“the dominion of darkness.”*** How do you get into the kingdom of the Son? The only way is the work of Christ. He forgave, redeemed, shed blood, reconciled, made peace… How many more ways could it be said that Christ’s work for us is forgiveness. That’s what Jesus did that we might be under him in his kingdom, now and for eternity.

So now I ask again, “If someone would watch your life for the next week, what would they think is the organizing principle of your life?” You know what it should be, don’t you? Christ the king, the head of his people, the church. Yes, we can spend huge amounts of attention on our kids, time at our work, money on our health, care on our appearances, and we can do so with Christ as the organizing principle.

We love our children, but they aren’t our gods. We love them, work for them, guide them, even discipline them just as Jesus took children in his arms and blessed them. We punch the time clock because we realize that God wants us to work for the good of society, to take care of family, to support his Church, but not because work is an end in itself. We take care of our health and appearance, not because we love ourselves first, but because we know that a healthy us can better carry out God’s will than a sick us, because taking care of appearances conveys a respect for others that Jesus showed in his dealing with all. Doing things because these are the things God wants us to do, even if they aren’t religious things, let’s people know that Christ is our King. But don’t just do it. Also say it once in a while.

Remember all that Christ Jesus is and has done for you. He in the one who is all a king should be. Amen.