

A Sermon for DaySpring
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Creator and Reconciler of All Things
Colossians 1
Christ the King Sunday
November 20, 2022

We've come to the final Sunday in the church's year, Christ the King Sunday. As we come to the final Sunday, we do so with a word of encouragement about who Jesus is and who we are in him—a word each of us in our own ways and for our own reasons probably needs to hear. There's no better way to end, and no more important word for us to hear. Jesus is Lord, and your life is held in his arms. This is all from the marvelous 1st chapter of Colossians.

When I hear today's reading from Colossians, I think of the statue *Christ the Redeemer* keeping watch over Rio de Janeiro Brazil. I've never been there to see it, but I've seen enough pictures to bring him to mind. Arms outstretched, set on a high hill, Christ writ large in that statue appears to be welcoming the city, perhaps even indeed the whole world into his arms and keeping vigil over them. Here is Christ set above all earthly concerns, keeping watch, holding it all together, and ultimately bringing the cosmos to God's purpose of peace. It's with this assurance and this image that we draw the year to a close this morning on Christ the King Sunday.

"Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step," wrote Dag Hammarskjöld, "Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step; only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road." (Markings, 7) With Colossians, our eyes are lifted to the horizon. They're lifted up, beyond any particular day with its promises and problems. Our eyes are lifted up higher, further, to the purposes of God, and God's destiny for our lives and all creation. We're supposed to keep our eyes there, always there no matter what else comes. Keep our eyes lifted to Christ.

In the first part of our reading, we are assured we can be confident in Christ who has already secured victory over the powers of death and evil. We will inherit the kingdom of God as those who join the saints in light. No matter what we may have to endure, we can do so joyfully because the cosmic battle against the darkness has already begun and, in fact, has already been won.

This assurance is given with such confidence because of who Paul believes Christ to be. And not just Paul, the writer, but the Colossians, his readers, too. Verses 15-20 appear to most biblical scholars to be a creed or a hymn that Paul quotes in his letter. In other words, this is a writing they already knew well, reciting it as part of their worship, maybe even singing it in some way. What that means is that this isn't something new Paul was introducing to his audience but something familiar he's asking them to remember as if their lives depend on it. It's a recitation of who Christ is and what Christ did for the world. It's appropriate that this morning we didn't

just read it, but we together recited from Colossians, chapter 1. I think this is something like how they would have used those words in 1st century Christian worship.

Two things stand out in it immediately. First, Christ is unequivocally the creator and the firstborn of all creation. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn from all creation. By him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, everything: thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities—all things created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him, all things hold together.

To confess Christ as creator establishes his identity as divine.

So, the first thing these early Christians believed and confessed in their church is Jesus Christ is the source of all life and all things. And this phrase, *in him all things hold together* is an amazing confession. He didn't just kick it all off and then kick back to watch it spin. He is the glue, the thread, the gravity of the cosmos. And because God is love, that means that it is the love of Christ that holds everything together. At the source of our being with one another and with all creation, no one is an isolated individual; no one and nothing is left out. No one and nothing is useless or worthless or a remainder. We are all bound together in Christ's divine, sacrificial love. The creation of the universe wasn't just a big bang of hydrogen atoms in instantaneous fusion; it was an explosion of all the divine love into all that was, all that is, and all that will be.

Christ is that love made known to us in flesh. In Him all things hold together. This claim has implications ecologically and cosmically, but I think where it comes to the heart in our lives is in those times when it feels like nothing is holding together, those times where everything is blowing up around us and even sometimes within us. Here is this word: in Him all things hold together. It's hard to believe that sometimes, or believe that there's actually a meaning to this that matters. In those kinds of times, we can find solace that when to our eyes everything is blowing apart, in the mystery of Christ, all things are held together. This is a mystery, but it's not a fantasy. Our faith is in the one who endured the cross. Remember that to those looking with human eyes at the cross, it was either a heartbreaking tragedy or a carnival of the foolishness of a delusional man. Yet, as it would become clear, the foolishness of the cross is the wisdom of God, the weakness of the cross is the power of God, and what looked like an end, was the beginning of redemption.

In Him all things hold together for good, for life. That's the first thing here: Christ is the creator and the one in whom all creation is sustained and has its life.

And second, he is the head of the church and the one who reconciled all things to God. He is the creator, and he is the reconciler.

By making God's love known to us, the church is the agent of that love on earth. Our purpose is to dwell in God's love made known in Christ, to receive Christ's ministry of reconciliation which is his restoring what is broken to wholeness, and to be ministers of reconciliation in the world. Christ's redemptive power works in those who open themselves to this purpose in the world.

Christ's reconciliation forgives sins, binds us to one another and our truest selves, and empowers us to heal the wounds, all the wounds, that open from our selfish ambitions.

Through Christ, the all-powerful creator who is over all things and through whom all things hold together, all those who hold to the good news are reconciled to God, forgiven of their sins, and discover their purpose in life is to be part of the kingdom of reconciliation, the reign of God's light that conquers the darkness within us and around us.

These two roles Creator and Reconciler are at the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ in the song of the early Christians, through the pen of St. Paul, made stone and steel in that marvelous statue in Rio, and now whisper to us. You're not alone. You never were; you never will be.

All of this is quite a remarkable confession from the early Christians about Jesus who not so long before was hung to die on a cross by a provincial roman governor. There's a good reason Dorothy Sayers once named the Christian gospel "the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man." (*Letters to a Diminished Church*, 1).

What kind of king is this anyway? They mocked him on the cross where they hung him to die.
 "He saved others, let him save himself if he's really the Messiah"
 "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself"

See, the rulers think they are putting Jesus to the test. If he is the messiah and king of the Jews then he will save himself from crucifixion. If he does this, his claims will be true. If he cannot do this his claims are false. It's the ultimate test.

They mocked him with the inscription: "This is the king of the Jews," this bloody, beaten, defeated pretender wearing a crown of thorns. Jesus' kingship, such as it was, was finished, put down, put to death, and put in its place by the efficiency and brutality of the empire's power flexing its muscles. He never had a chance, did he? Yet another starry-eyed romantic pressed into the ground.

All Jesus says, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." They really didn't, did they? How could they?

How could they know the god they were tangling with. How could they know he was not sent to save himself? His power isn't displayed in vanquishing his enemies or avoiding suffering. His power is made perfect in weakness. God-made-flesh can endure their taunts and their thorns because he can also endure darkness and death. He was not sent to save himself from them. He is the saved one who spends himself for them. He died as he lived to show us how to die that we may learn how to actually live.

Within a generation, Paul can write to the little community of Christians and to us, "May you be strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to

endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has given you the inheritance of the saints of light, and rescued you from the power of darkness.”

This is not a story of defeat, but a story of victory. This is a resurrection story. Paul knew it. The early Christians knew it. And because they both knew it, they knew that the kingship of Christ was not an acidic joke at the expense of the idealistic hopes of one Nazarene, but a mysterious reality that changed everything for all creation, all things visible and invisible.

The word *all* is everything in this passage. All things, all people, all kingdoms, all things. Not some things, not some people, all creation.

All of you. All.

Not a part of you, or some of you, or the best part of you. All of you, created, redeemed, brought to the kingdom of the Son. This is the horizon on which we set our eyes and our hope. With our eyes there, we can walk the path before us wherever it leads. With our eyes fixed there, we can endure all things.

This year has been quite a year for this congregation. We have welcomed so many beloved babies; we bid farewell to a few saints. We worshipped outside and inside, at the baptistry, the bell tower, and the communion table. We took our largest group of youth to youth camp, a great group of kids to children’s camp, and a group on a pilgrimage to Assisi. The doors of Naomi House and the doors of our hearts opened wide to new friends. The building committee started seeing dreams take shape. A college ministry began. We ate breakfasts and lunches, and dinners and Eucharist together around tables and at a farm and under the trees. New trails were cut in the trees and our imaginations. A lot of things lost to us for 2 years began to come back, but not everything and everyone yet. It’s been quite a year of things visible and invisible.

And now we begin again. With the glorious image of Christ’s reign in our eyes and ears, we turn again with the prophets to ask, “How long?” How long for that day to come when the invisible mystery of Christ’s reign becomes full in our eyes? How long must we wait? No one knows, he will tell us. But until that day, we watch, keep alert, hold the faith, walk the path, give and receive grace, and walk forward one step at a time. For this world is his. And you are his. And you are created in love and knit together in mercy and held together in grace. Until his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven and until that day when all things are reconciled fully in him, Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, in whom we say Thanks be to God.

Amen.

