

Scripture:

Colossians 1:13-23

“Jesus Christ --- who He is and what He has done.”

Today is the very last Sunday in the church year.

Next Sunday --- the first of Advent we begin our journey through the church year.

And so today the last Sunday of the year ---- we celebrate Christ the King Sunday.

Christ as King.

And we refer to Him as our King because He rules over us and we follow Him ----- attempting as best as we can to do as He says and as He does.

But that's about as far as we can extend the accepted understanding of Kingship.

One who rules ---- and one who has people who follow that rule --- authority ---- and way of doing things.

Because the Kingship of Christ is unlike any other Kingship.

Today in our passage from Paul's letter to the Colossians we have a powerful expression of just who Jesus is and what He has done.

It's a kind of summary of Jesus Christ in 9 sentences.

But before we get there ---- Christ as King.

In talking about the Kingship of Christ --- we are talking not just of kingship over a time --- or a region ---- or a collection of people --- in talking of the Kingship of Christ we're talking about a cosmic kingship.

A Kingship that goes beyond and across all borders --- all time --- all space - ---- and all peoples.

It's a kingship that is about the whole of creation.

The Kingship of Christ is about every ant --- every star --- every moon --- every drop of water --- every planet ---- every galaxy ----- all the oceans --- including the puddle in your back yard near the edge of the fence --- it's about you --- it's about me ----- it's about the beautiful trees outside ---- it's about all the bears --- snakes ----- squirrels ---- all the grass ----- concrete --- -- the clouds --- bushes --- flowers ---- it's about absolutely everything.

Christ's Kingship is about absolutely everything in all of creation.

And then second Jesus --- King Jesus ---- never came to sit on a throne --- instead He came to hang on a cross.

King Jesus never came to sit on a throne --- He came to hang on a cross.

The Kingship of Christ must never simply be relegated to a throne in heaven.

It's heaven for sure ----- but it's so much more as well.

And it isn't about a throne --- comfort --- power ---- prestige ---- servants --- -- it's about a cross --- sacrifice --- suffering ----- salvation --- servanthood.

It's about life giving --- saving ----- selfless love --- that suffered and suffers.

It's about shattering the myth of self-dependency and journeying into the deepest truths of God-dependency.

The Kingship of Christ is counter intuitive and radically transformative.

Remember ----- Christ is the one who treated the outcast and poor as part of the royal family.

He is the king who invited the lame and the least to His royal banquet table.

He is the one who in one of His last acts welcomed a criminal into His kingdom as they died side by side on their crosses.

He is the King whose authority is established only as He is killed and humiliated.

And the meaning of His authority is found in His selflessness and servanthood.

A King rules --- that's what makes a King a king --- the fact that they rule over something.

Paradoxically Jesus established His rule by being executed.

It is in His crucifixion that He firmly begins His reign.

Counter intuitive --- paradox ----- transformational ---- cosmic Kingship.

In Colossians today Paul is holding up as King ---- one who most people simply thought of an ordinary human being --- just another itinerant Jewish teacher among many other traveling teachers.

But Paul knows Jesus is different ---- and so he ascribes to Him all power --- all authority ----- and all possible redemptive possibilities.

Paul basically says ---- this man Jesus --- is God --- and so everything that God can do this man can do.

It's an outrageous claim really --- to put on another human being.

To say they are God and can do whatever God can do.

But this is precisely what Paul so rightly does.

And just as it was difficult to fully grasp this when Paul first spoke --- so it is today.

Today --- when we still experience cancer
 --- when we still experience Alzheimer's disease
 ----- when we still see racism and sexism
 ----- when we see people crippled by anxiety --- and fear and depression
 ---- when we still witness horrible accidents --- health challenges --- MS -----
 ----- bi-polar and so on

----- when we experience people doing such hurtful things to each other.

When we see a world that still has all of these things --- it can be hard to imagine a King who rules over these things and yet still lets them happen.

How do we reconcile this?

Christ as King ---- all powerful --- all the power of God --- where He can do anything --- and in an instant --- how do we reconcile this with cancer --- and Alzheimer's and sexism and racism and hurt and pain so on.

Very difficult to understand --- this side of the grave.

The first verse of our passage today says --- "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son..."

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son..."

In other words ---- He has shattered the myth of self-dependency and brought us to the deepest truth of God-dependency.

That's how we reconcile racism --- sexism ----- disease ----- anxiety --- depression ---- violence --- and so on.

Without God ---- people walk through life ----- they live their lives as if stumbling around in the dark.

Honestly --- looking at our world ---- is sometimes like watching people stumbling around --- feeling around somewhat timidly ---- in the dark --- bumping into things ----- not really knowing what they are doing ---- disoriented cautious --- unsure --- lost.

"From darkness to light." --- Paul writes ----- without God people fumble around as if walking in a dark room they aren't even familiar with.

And so along comes Jesus redeeming us from what otherwise would be a miserable outcome.

As Christians --- at least we know we're stumbling around in the dark --- seeing as if through a glass and darkly.

And as Christians we also know that in light of Christ ---- one day the lights will come on and we'll see things in all of their fullness --- and glory.

Verse 13 ----- "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son..."

And then verse 14 ---- "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins..."

Do you know what redemption actually means?

To be redeemed means to be freed.

Redemption is the word that is used to describe freedom from slavery.

To be redeemed means to be liberated --- set free from ----- released from.

To be redeemed in Christ means we are set free from --- darkness -----

set free ----- from Alzheimer's disease

----- set free from MS

----- set free from anxiety and fear

---- set free from racism

--- set free from war and hatred --- set free from sin.

Set free from fumbling around in the dark ---- lost ---- wayward.

I really feel sorry for people who think this is all there is ---- that God doesn't have more in store than just this life --- that Christ isn't the King who will one day ---- come and turn the lights on for humanity --- and enable us to see things clearly and openly and freely --- in all their truth --- wonder ---- and beauty.

It took a sheer and utter descent into the deepest of darkness ---- the cross --- -- for Christ to conquer the darkness --- and re-emerge bringing light and love and fullness of life.

Paul addresses his friends in Colossae in our passage today --- to remind them that Jesus is totally unique and different from anyone else --- He is God's Son --- God Himself.

The people had become discouraged --- and if you look at the verses before our reading today --- you see that Paul prays for them ----- encouraging them --- helping them to endure and be patient despite the darkness.

It's all too easy to take passages like this one for granted --- or to gloss over them.

Yes we know that Jesus is the image of God --- God Himself ---- verse 15.

Yes we know that He is the one through whom all things have been created - -- verse 16.

Yes we know He is above all things --- verse 17.

Yes we know He is the one who holds all things together --- verse 17.

Yes we know He is the head of the body and the one in whom all fullness dwells --- verses 18 and 19.

We know these things.

And ---- yes we know that He has rescued us from darkness and brought us into His kingdom ---- verse 13.

Yes we know that He has given us redemption --- verse 13 --- and provided us with forgiveness --- also verse 13.

Yes we know He has made peace on earth through His blood ---- and reconciled all things to Himself --- verse 20.

It's easy to take these things for granted --- the things He has done --- and all He is.

And it's especially easy for these things to get lost and convoluted --- garbled up ---- because of hatred --- anxiety ---- disease --- the all too familiar realities and limitations of this world.

The Kingship of Christ isn't about a beautiful plush golden throne --- servants --- fans ----- grapes and delicacies ---- that we look up to ---- far off in the distance --- the afterlife --- sometime later.

The Kingship of Christ is on the cross ---- in selfless and saving love ----- it's in the lost being welcomed at the banquet table --- the poor being made part of the royal family ---- the criminal being invited into the kingdom as he dies brutally with Christ ----- it's about the light shining onto everything at last and making things clear and visible and beautiful and true ---- and it's about right here and now too.

It's about Christ "stuck in the mud next to me" --- as Leonard Cohen said --- -- sad to see him called home this week wasn't it.

Make no mistake about it ----- Christ does in fact rule.

Christ the King Sunday is the bold affirmation that Christ does in fact rule.

It's about shattering the myth of self-dependency and journeying into the deepest truth of God-dependency.

Jesus is not a far removed king on high ----- instead He is the one who humbly bends Himself into our brokenness so that we might be healed ----- -- saved --- reconciled ---- redeemed.

The kingship of Christ is all about Christ being present in the challenges of the world.

In the pain and suffering ---- the uncertainties of this world.

And the cross and the grave are where Christ's power and authority and saving love are most evident.

Christ our King hangs around places of darkness --- and challenge and pain - ---- and suffering.

Whenever darkness is made light ---- Christ is there.

Whenever burdens are alleviated --- Christ is there.

When creation responds to the movement of God --- there is Christ found.

And whenever the impossible becomes the inevitable --- it is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the cosmic King ----- the one who permanently changes all things that really matter.

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son...”

He rescues us from evil --- sin --- death ----- decay --- and darkness.

That’s who He is and that’s what He has done --- and nothing less.

The Colossians had been led astray by the mystery religions in and around their city and culture --- the spiritual but not religious of the day.

False teachers and false prophets --- were telling and selling them a whole lot of foolishness and they were losing their faith and becoming discouraged and misguided.

And so Paul says ---“Come on now ----- we have Jesus Christ --- the be all and the end all ---- the Son of God ---- very God Himself ----- the one who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son ---- and don’t ever forgot it.”

It’s as if ----- Paul says ---- “Come on now --- let’s not join in with these people ---- look at them ---- stumbling around in the dark --- fumbling about --- lost --- misguided.”

The truth is ---- we have the one of light and truth and love --- yes life can be brutal --- taxing --- trying ---- but we mustn’t ever lose hope ----- we must be patient and endure ---- His day is coming ---- His rule is on its way.

And just like those at Colossae we too are often surrounded by people living in the dominion of darkness.

People who just go on in life with nothing but --- get up
 --- take out the garbage
 --- wash the car
 --- get the groceries
 ----- mow the lawn
 ---- and then in due time shovel the snow
 ----- Oh the week end is here now
 --- sleep in a little later
 ---- stay up a little later it's Friday and Saturday
 ---- and then Oh it's Sunday now
 --- I love Sunday's it's nice and quiet -- not too many shops are open until later in the day
 --- I can rest and do what I want today --- it's slow and quiet ---- it's my day
 --- it's Sunday.

And then --- Oh --- it's Monday
 --- up and at er so I can be sure to --- well you know --- live another day --- buy more stuff ---- and entertain myself and satisfy my wants needs and desires as I so define them.

So that when Christmas comes I can buy some more stuff to have fun with and eat more food with family and friends ---- because that's what Christmas is about after all --- getting and giving stuff ---- and having treats --- and lights and tinsel and wrapping things up ----- and not having to get up and go to work for a few days --- and well maybe donating a bit of food and a bit of money to others --- why not --- isn't that also what some people do this time of year – you know those ummm Christians.

And then we're on to the day after Christmas --- getting great deals on more stuff --- and spending any money I got for Christmas before going back to work again so that I can ----- well work until the next vacation time.

And isn't the next time off sometime around Easter ---- oh I love that time of the year --- we get to eat chocolates and get ready for Spring isn't that what Easter is about ---- a Friday and maybe even a Monday off too ---- and flowers and bunnies and butterflies and chicks --- and chocolate --- spring's coming --- yep --- that's what Easter is all about.

These are the people Paul is talking about --- stumbling around in the dominion darkness ---- fumbling they're way through life --- without the light of Christ.

Not bad people --- many of them --- just misguided --- lost --- in need of Christ --- as we all are.

People who have no idea who Jesus is and what He has done --- or at least aren't moved to change their way of being because of who He is and what He has done.

When we downplay the radical nature of Gods' love in Jesus Christ it's like we're just turning down the dimmer switch on He who is the light of the world --- making it harder --- and more difficult --- for people to see and know Him.

Jesus is our prophet --- the one who declares God's Word ---- the one who is God's Word.

Jesus is our Priest --- the one who intercedes on our behalf ----- redeeming us from all that ails us --- sin ---- death --- decay.

And especially for today Jesus is our King ---- the one who rules over us --- the one whose lead we follow ----- the one who sheds light on the sometimes darkness of this world.

The Kingship of Christ shatters the myth of self-dependency and invites us into the deepest truth of God-dependency.

It's about the impossible becoming the inevitable.

It's about being rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God.

And finally -----

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today --- Colossians 1:13-23 ----

“For he 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.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And 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.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and 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.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul --- and I Jonathan --- have become a servant.”

Amen.