

Sunday 24th November 2019

Christ the King

The Sunday next before Advent

Red or White



Collect

Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King: keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Colossians 1:11-20 English Standard Version (ESV)

Thanksgiving and Prayer

¹ ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks^[a] to the Father, who has qualified you^[b] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Pre-eminence of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by^[c] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Footnotes: a. or *patience, with joy giving thanks*. b. some manuscripts *us*. c. that is, by means of; or *in*.

COMMENT: In this passage, Paul told the Colossians what the human race will be like when the spiritual evolution which God began with creation and the reconciliation brought to fulfilment in Jesus. This final goal will be

accomplished when all creation is brought together in faith under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Here we have Paul's Christology in a few sentences which are among the most powerful of all his writing. In a nutshell, Paul is talking about four elements in the divine purpose: Jesus, the human manifestation of God; all of us who are the believing church in every age; the whole of the created universe; and the relationship to God all may have through faith in Christ Jesus. But he is also talking about the specific historical situation in the Colossian church about thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus. Some members were following false teaching. Colossae was a thoroughly Hellenistic city in the Lycus River valley about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Paul did not found the church in Colossae nor had he visited there. He knew of them only by reports he had received, probably from Epaphras, Paul's fellow missionary who appears to have been in charge of the three churches in the Lycus valley – Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. For the most part Gentiles made up the Colossian congregation. Verses 15-20 are a hymn in praise of Christ in two strophes (vss.15-18a; 18b-20). What faith in Christ offered the Colossians and all believers since is a Sovereign who makes this reconciliation with our Creator God a living reality.

Luke 23:33-43 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Crucifixion

23 ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."^[a] And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him,^[b] "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him,^[c] saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Footnotes: a. some manuscripts omit the sentence *And Jesus... what they do*. b. some manuscripts add *in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew*. c. or *blasphemed him*.

COMMENT: The Garden Tomb located near a cliff face that still resembles a human skull attracts the attention of countless devout tourists. Maps of Jerusalem as it was on crucifixion day, reveal that if this was the site of the execution and burial of Jesus, this event occurred near a main road out of the city just beyond the Damascus Gate. If, as many also believe, Golgotha was near the present site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it was also a very public place just beyond the city walls. The Romans' purpose in holding executions in such places was to subdue the populace and so declaring Roman sovereignty through terror. Despite the claim of the Jewish authorities that they had no king but Caesar, Jews did not consider themselves nor were they recognised as citizens by Roman law. The mob's outcry for crucifixion, however, persuaded the ruthless governor Pilate to sacrifice the life of an innocent man for the sake of political convenience. The fact that according to the gospel record Jesus claimed that his kingdom was spiritual and "not of this world" had no meaning for Pilate. By the time Luke wrote his gospel circa AD 80-85, Romans regarded Christians as committing treason against the religious and political fabric of the state. The penalty for this was death. The Christian interpretation of Jesus' sovereignty rests exclusively on the belief that he was indeed the longed-for Saviour Messiah, but of a totally different kind than that of popular Jewish tradition of a monarch of David's line who would restore Israel's glory. Luke did reflect the popular image of a divinely anointed king and military conqueror when he recorded the cries of the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers, "He saved others: let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" (verse 35) and "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" (verse 37) According to the Christian understanding of the messianic tradition, rooted as it was in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, Jesus could not do what the crowd demanded and fulfill his mission as the real Messiah/Christ. As we celebrate of the Reign of Christ, we call to mind the whole incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection-ascension story which the gospels present. Beyond all other authorities to which we may be tempted to submit, the Christian story declares once and for all the absolute sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ in and through human history. We are called to live under Christ's authority the justice, love and peace that we see in him. The circumstances of our present moment in history call us to engage in this mission as never before.

Psalm 46 *Deus noster refugium* Grail Psalter

℟ **The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold.**

¹ *For the Choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. Intoned like "The Maidens" A Song.*

² God is for us a refuge and strength,
a helper close at hand, in time of distress,

³ so we shall not fear though the earth should rock,
though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea;

⁴ even though its waters rage and foam,
even though the mountains be shaken by its waves. **℟**

The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

℟ The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

⁵ The waters of a river give joy to God's city,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

⁶ God is within, it cannot be shaken;
God will help it at the dawning of the day.

⁷ Nations are in tumult, kingdoms are shaken:
he lifts his voice, the earth shrinks away. **℟**

⁸ The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. **℟**

⁹ Come, consider the works of the Lord,
the redoubtable deeds he has done on the earth.

¹⁰ He puts an end to wars over all the earth;
the bow he breaks, the spear he snaps.

(He burns the shields with fire.)

¹¹ "Be still and know that I am God,
supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth!" **℟**

¹² The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This psalm celebrates the sovereignty of God over all of creation and history. It offers the people of God a sure and certain refuge amid disasters of natural and political disasters.

Post Communion

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by you be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing

Christ our King make you faithful and strong to do his will, that you may reign with him in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**