

Sermon – November 20, 2022  
“Peace through the blood of his cross”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Colossians 1:11-20

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill our open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Good morning. Welcome to the end of our year-long journey through the Christian calendar. Next Sunday, the start of Advent, marks the beginning of a new year on the Christian calendar. Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the year on the Christian calendar. Over the last year we have moved from the anticipation of Jesus' birth (Advent) to Jesus' arrival as a baby in a manger (Christmas), a time when we say, "Come, Lord Jesus." We have traveled together and witnessed the arrival of wise men in Jerusalem who were following a star as the world searched for a king whom the heavens proclaimed (Epiphany). We have stood on a river bank and seen Jesus as a grown man submit to the baptism of John the Baptist in the Jordan and witnessed the descending of Holy Spirit on Jesus in the form of a dove. We have climbed transfiguration mountain with Peter, James, John, and Jesus and heard witnesses describe Jesus' transfiguration. We have listened to Jesus teach in synagogues in Galilee, heard him proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, and heard witnesses share how Jesus healed people. We

have heard witnesses speak to Jesus' suffering and death on a cross, and have heard their testimony about his lifeless body being placed in a tomb. We went with the women to the tomb early on the first day of the week and discovered an empty tomb. (Easter) and have shared the good news that Christ is risen. And we have been with the disciples and other witnesses in the upper room when Jesus appeared to them in a resurrected body. We have heard from witnesses who watched Jesus ascend to heaven and have witnessed the arrival of Holy Spirit seen as tongues of fire at Pentecost. We have listened to Paul share with the early church about Jesus and his teachings and learned more about how to live as Jesus asked us to live. And now, after a year's journey together, we have come to the last Sunday in our yearly journey, completing the cycle of the Christian calendar again. We have come to celebrate Christ the King.

Hopefully, we have learned more about Jesus, God, and ourselves as we have journeyed with Jesus during this last year. Hopefully, we are beginning to grow in our knowledge of Jesus and as we do, we are also growing in our knowledge of God. Next Sunday is the first day of Advent. We will again gather a little before 7:00 a.m. at the Cunningham's house to witness the rising of the sun, behold the start of another year, and begin together a new journey with Jesus and each other through the cycle of the Christian calendar. Our hope for the coming year is that we may again walk with Jesus and continue to grow in our knowledge of Jesus and, through him, of God.

Years ago, when Kay and I taught Sunday school for elementary children, I found that one of the most challenging concepts for me to teach was that of a king. There are no first-hand examples in our country, and the word "king" as taught in our history classes does not transfer well in an established democracy. I might have found a child who named their dog "King" in hopes of his being the biggest, best, and smartest dog, but the idea of absolute authority with no checks or balances is not a thought that is easy to communicate to people living in the U.S. I am not sure that I teach well on this topic either, as I also lack depth and experience with the concept of a king. In reality, about as close as I come is having once played "king on the mountain" with other kids in my community, struggling to push the other children off the top of a dirt pile and then stay there long enough to proclaim myself king of the mountain. Today for a few minutes, let's look together at Paul's letter to the Colossians and hear how Paul, who did have firsthand experience with the concept of a king, tries to guide our thoughts on the subject of Christ the king.

Paul begins his teaching about Christ the king by pointing us to Jesus' glorious power, a power which is available to us if we will ask Jesus for such strength. Knowledge that Jesus' power is available to us is to bring joy to our hearts and thankfulness to our lips, because, through Jesus, we are enabled to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Jesus has reached out and rescued us from the power of darkness. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and our faith in Jesus's saving work, we have been transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son, a kingdom where Jesus is the ruler and where we who have been rescued find redemption and forgiveness of sins. Now I don't know about each of us, but I don't typically wake up each morning recalling that I have been transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son. I should, and I should endeavor to start my day with praise that I am now a member of this new kingdom. We should take note that when Paul writes about this kingdom and refers to it as Jesus' kingdom, such as the kingdom of the beloved Son, he is referring to the in-breaking kingdom that we are part of in the now but not yet kingdom of God. By contrast, when Paul refers to the kingdom of God, he is typically referring to the return of Jesus in power and the complete establishment of God's kingdom in its full and eternal form. Paul's guidance for us who have been transferred into the beloved Son's kingdom is to endure everything with patience while joyfully giving thanks to the Father. As we become conscious in the morning, at some point our thoughts should turn to this knowledge and when they do, our response is to give the Father praise and thanks. We are to be those who do not complain about our state, but give God praise for Jesus' shed blood and our transfer into the in-breaking kingdom of God. I will confess to you that I am not good at keeping an awareness of which kingdom I am in as I go through my day. There are not many mornings yet when I wake up and give praise to the Father that I have been transferred from the power of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son and continue to do so all the day long. I am working on that and recommend that we all try to adopt this focus and begin our days by remembering we have been transferred and joyfully thanking the Father for Jesus Christ and continuing to give praise all the day long. We might also want to have compassion for those who are still in the grips of the power of darkness and pray for their rescue, asking Jesus what we can do each day to help in his rescue mission.

I will confess to you that I don't endure everything with patience very well. We should keep in mind that the idea of patience is not me enduring something like COVID and how bad I feel, which I don't endure well either. Patience is related primarily to people, not things. The idea

of patience has more to do with how I am to have joy when I am working with people who are still trapped in the power of darkness and patiently withstand their sin and any actions aimed at me. If we have patience, then we will not find bitterness growing in our hearts when those trapped in the power of darkness seek to wound us. We will not give into the desire to return blow for blow, but will patiently endure their wounding attempts, keeping in mind that we also were once deceived and held captive by the powers of darkness. We are to joyfully, in light of the knowledge we have in Jesus about our current kingdom citizenship, receive their attacks and patiently endure. Augustine said “that the one who shows patience prefers to endure evil so as not to commit it rather than to commit evil so as not to endure it.”<sup>i</sup> Our response to people is to be patient.

Today on Christ the King Sunday we should recall what it means for Jesus to be our king. There are few passages that I am aware of which speak to Jesus’ kingship better than the passage from Colossians that was read earlier. By contrast in 1 Samuel, chapter 8, when Israel asks for an earthly king, God gives Samuel a list of king attributes to remind the people of what earthly kings are like. Let me read some of those attributes this morning: This is from 1 Samuel, chapter 8 verses 11 – 18: “He said, ‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.’”<sup>ii</sup> I don’t think it takes much mental work to move these words from Samuel forward to today. Wouldn’t it be nice if the tax burden were only 10%? Can we identify with our own bureaucracy taking from people to give things to their constituents? This struggle is no different today than it became for Israel. Even if we have new means and names for the movement of ones’ goods to other people, the same cautions apply to earthly kings and leaders.

Let's contrast these ideas about kingship with those Paul outlines for Jesus. Paul begins by pointing us to Jesus' role in creation, telling us that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. Everything in heaven and on earth was created in him, both the visible, where we see God's hand in the beauty of creation all around us, and the invisible, the thrones, dominions, rulers or powers Paul speaks to, all have been created through Jesus and for him. Jesus is before all things. And it is through Jesus that all things, even powers of darkness and those they enslave, are held together in Jesus. Paul wants us to be clear that Jesus is the firstborn of primitive creation. There is nothing in heaven or on earth that is not connected to Jesus.

Paul then moves to Jesus' role as the head of the church. Whatever church hierarchy we have put in place to govern the many little churches that constitute the Church of Jesus has Jesus as the head. All leaders look to him for leadership and are subject to his rule. Jesus is the beginning of the church. He is the first born from the dead. The church operates in the now of the kingdom of the beloved Son as the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouths of Jesus to bring forth fully the in-breaking kingdom of God. This is us at work in this place with Jesus in his mission.

The last part of Paul's description of Jesus as king is Jesus' role in redemption. We might recall from the days of our Old Testament journey that Israel was enslaved in cruel bondage in Egypt. The Israelites were subjects or slaves, entrapped in the power of darkness. Yet God had promised them freedom and a physical place to live, the promised land, the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. God's mighty hand is visible in securing Israel's freedom from Egypt and bringing them into the Promised Land, but Israel was not able to live before God in the land. There is something more, a greater redemption than freedom from Egypt and living in a promised land that is needed. This is the great vision of God for His people we find in Revelation, where God is reconciled to His people, where God is present with them, where there is no death, no suffering, no pain, and every tear is wiped from our eyes by the hand of God. Jesus' kingly role in redemption is not to come as a war like king and establish his kingdom through might. Jesus' role is to do the Father's will and to die so that we might all be redeemed. Through Jesus's death, death is defeated and by his blood shed on the cross, we have peace with God. All of creation is redeemed through Jesus. It is through Jesus' death on the cross that our sins are forgiven, cast into the sea of forgetfulness by God to be remembered no more, and we are able to have peace with God, escaping God's wrath.

Who is this king? Christ the King. He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, the one through whom all things in heaven and on earth are created, the first born from the dead, the one in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and the one through whom peace with God was made with all things on earth and in heaven through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. We have spent a year on a journey with this king and the many witnesses to his earthly presence given to us through the Holy Scriptures, and next week we will again restart another journey to grow in the knowledge of Jesus, his revelation to us of the invisible God, and of God's will for all people. We have gathered here today and every day of our journey to worship this king because he is worthy of our worship. We seek to endure everything with patience while joyfully giving thanks to the Father for King Jesus.

As we move from worship of Christ the King into a new year and a new journey, there are three actions we should seek to take with us on our new journey. The first is to seek to grow in the knowledge of God. "Knowledge of God is essential for proper living."<sup>iii</sup> We should seek to deepen our understanding of God through Jesus' revelation that we might be equipped to live lives consistent with those at peace with God. To do this we need to encounter Jesus Christ and one of the best ways to do that is through the reading, study, and sharing of Scripture. Seek new opportunities to go deeper into the word of God. Commit to reading the entire Bible this year, join a Bible study or Sunday School class, and if you can't find one that meets your schedule, then start one by getting together with a few friends and reading God's word. The next action is to seek to grow in our understanding of God's will. Too often we hear of people who are seeking to know God's will for their lives. We are to seek a thorough knowledge of God's will that we will be enabled to "shield ourselves from false teaching."<sup>iv</sup> Again, we are to turn to God's word and seek to grow in our understanding of the steadfast love of God for all people that none may be lost and then to apply that knowledge under the guidance of Holy Spirit to spiritually discern God's will. We will find a love so steadfast towards us that God's own son Jesus Christ will die for our sin, so that through the blood of the cross we may find peace with God. Finally, we are to seek to be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.<sup>v</sup> Our goal is to become those who are obedient to God. In the great commission, we are sent out to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us. Knowledge alone does not bring forth obedience. We may be successful in growing in our knowledge of God by study, but we need something

more. We might be able to grow spiritually in our ability to discern God's will, but we need something more in order for us to do God's will. Here is where we seek to pray more fervently to be strengthened with all power according to Christ the King's glorious might, that we might become those who are enabled for obedience. In this coming year, seek to be those who are praying for ourselves and those around us to be strengthened with all power according to Christ the King's glorious might.

*Pray with me: Jesus, we worship you this day as our king and cast our crowns before you, asking that in the coming year we might grow in knowledge of the Father through your life, grow in our ability to spiritually discern the Father's will more completely, and be strengthened with your glorious power for obedience to the Father's will. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Garland, David E.. Colossians, Philemon (The NIV Application Commentary Book 12) (p. 69). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 648). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Garland, David E.. Colossians, Philemon (The NIV Application Commentary Book 12) (p. 69). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> Garland, David E.. Colossians, Philemon (The NIV Application Commentary Book 12) (p. 70). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> Garland, David E.. Colossians, Philemon (The NIV Application Commentary Book 12) (p. 75). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.