

November 20, 2016

CHRIST OUR KING

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Colossians 1.11-20

A few years ago, my granddaughter and her husband
adopted two orphaned sisters from Romania
and brought them to live in Virginia in the United States.
Can you imagine what a change that was for those girls?
They not only went from an orphanage into a loving home,
but they were surrounded by a new language,
different food,
new sights and sounds and smells.
It was a whole new world!

Well, that's the sort of change that Paul says has happened to us who are Christians.
He says that God " has rescued us from the power of darkness
and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son."
The "rescued" idea reminds us of the Exodus.
There God rescued Israel from a life of hard bondage as slaves in Egypt
and set them as a nation of free people in their own land.
So what is it from which God has rescued us?
For the Colossians, to whom Paul wrote these words, it was the darkness of paganism.
They lived in a world of gods who were capricious and jealous and fickle,
gods who always had to be paid off with sacrifices
lest they make life utterly miserable for you.
For us, it is the darkness of secularism,
which sees the world as a closed universe which is devoid of purpose or value.
Our culture has increasingly become aware that the world it envisions
is a world without meaning
and a world in which there is really nothing on which we can depend.
The pagans lived in a world of fear; we live in a world of isolation and alienation.

Paul said that God has rescued us from that
and has transferred us into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
So, what's the difference?
What is it about the kingdom of Christ that is so much better?

Well, the nature of a kingdom depends totally on its king.
If you live under a bad king, life is generally bad.
If you live under a good kind, life is generally good.
So Paul tells us about our King,
probably using language that Christians were already using in worship.

He tells us that Christ is our Representative.

On the one hand, he represents God to us humans,

“He is the image of the invisible God.”

In Jesus Christ we see God with a human face;

the better you understand Jesus Christ, the better you understand God.

On the other hand, he represents us humans to God.

That’s what happened on the cross:

“He ...bore our sins in his body on the cross.” (1 Peter 2.24)

And that’s what happened in his resurrection:

he destroyed the power of death and gave us new life.

Because Jesus Christ is our Representative we can be members of his kingdom,

not by works of righteousness which we have done,

but by the amazing grace of God that is given us in Christ.

Paul also says that Christ is the Creator of all things.

Everything that exists was created in him and through him and for him.

That’s **everything!**

From the innumerable galaxies of our universe

to the electrons and photons that are the building blocks of all that exists,

to the immaterial forces that affect all of life.

Christ made it all.

Christ holds it all together, so that creation continues.

But because things have gone awry in creation,

at least in that part of creation that we human beings touch and affect,

Paul also tells us that Christ is the Reconciler.

What I said before about the pagan world and about our secular world

makes it clear that humanity as a whole does not acknowledge its creator.

There is a gap between God and human beings that no human can bridge.

But God sent his beloved Son into the world to be the Christ

who will bridge that gap and reconcile the creation to the Creator.

How that will happen we cannot know

when that will happen we cannot know.

But the foundation of that reconciliation was laid on the cross of Calvary

where Christ gave his life “for our sins,

and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” (1 Jn 2.2)

That’s what Paul told the Colossians:

“Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,

whether on earth or in heaven,

by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

Christ is our Representative, our Creator and our Reconciler.

So it is not just a good King that we have.
Jesus Christ is an awesomely wonderful King!
So what does it mean for us today to be citizens of the kingdom of Christ?
What does it mean for the life and mission of St. Andrew's?

First, let's be clear what it does not mean.
It does not mean that we are a special people,
who somehow deserve to be God's people.

Not at all.

We are citizens of the kingdom of Christ because God has chosen us,
Christ has died for us,
the Holy Spirit has enabled us to respond to God's call.
It is God's grace, God's steadfast love that makes us kingdom citizens,
and that is true from beginning to end.

Nor does it mean that we are a privileged people,
that we will be spared the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

All the troubles and pains and sorrows of this world
touch us just as they touch others.

When a recession hits, we are not exempt from pink slips.

My one son died of H1N1 flu.

My other son has struggled for years with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

My first wife, Dort, died of a congenital liver disease.

We are not a privileged people.

What we are is a **responsible** people.

God has called us into the kingdom of Christ
so that we may be servants of God,
servants of those God brings into our lives,
And servants of the created world.

In that we are like our King, who told his disciples,
"I am among you as one who serves."
and who also told them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

We are responsible to serve God as Jesus Christ served God.

As he represented God before human beings,
we are to represent him.

In our words and in our deeds, we are to reflect
the love, the righteousness and the justice of our King.
As he reconciled the world to God in his death and resurrection,
we are called to the ministry of reconciliation.

We live in a divided world, and the divisions are wide and deep.

We are called to do all we can to bridge those divisions,
to draw people together in harmony -
remembering that harmony does not mean that we all think alike.
As he is the Creator of all things,
we are called to be creative in our service.
We live in a rapidly changing world,
and we need to be ready to change our ways of service.
We cannot serve today's world with yesterday's methods.
We cannot tell the gospel story to a digital world using flannelgraphs
or speak to millennials using King James English.
But most of all, we must always remember,
no matter what form our service takes in a changing world,
we must always remember that we have been saved to serve.

My brothers and sisters, fellow citizens of the kingdom of Christ.
Let us this day solemnly reaffirm our citizenship in that kingdom.
Let us joyfully take up the responsibility that God has given us.
Let us commit ourselves afresh to worshipping and serving God.
Let us commit ourselves to learning to be servants of God,
of one another, and of our world.
Let us make those familiar words,
"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven"
a living reality in our lives and in the life of St. Andrew's.
May God grant us grace to do that, day by day. Amen.