

He Is the Beginning
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November 20, 2016

Colossians 1:11–20

¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and 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.

Luke 23:33–43

³³When they came to the place that is called 'The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.']] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' ⁴²Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'
⁴³He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Today we close out the calendar year of an extraordinary God, our extraordinary God. We'll begin it all again next week as we prepare for God to give up power and arrive in the most helpless form, an infant. Today we are reminded that this same God through Jesus gave up his power, and thus his life, at the very end. These two actions, and all the rest we

read about throughout the year, are for us. If we felt we lacked for reminders that God's ways are not like human ways, God's priorities are not like human priorities, God's concerns are not like human concerns, then today is the day for us.

Here on Christ the King Sunday, or Reign of Christ Sunday, we acknowledge and affirm that God is our ruler, that God is the one to whom, and under whom, we are subjects. We receive, and welcome, this reminder because sometimes, especially some Novembers, we tend to get very focused on human rulers and human constructs of nations and human allegiances to other humans. In fact, Christ the King Sunday was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 as a response to "growing secularism."¹ From the encyclical declaring Christ the King Sunday, he wrote, "gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and to be placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the state and tolerated more or less at the whim of princes and rulers... When once [people] recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony...for with the spread and the universal extent of the kingdom of Christ [people] will become more and more conscious of the link that binds them together, and thus many conflicts will be either prevented entirely or at least their bitterness will be diminished."²

We are God's, above everything and everyone else, and we are **all** God's. When we acknowledge Christ as King, we profess that God's power is greater, of a magnitude we cannot grasp. The writer to the Colossians emphasizes that, as one of the persons of God, Jesus shares this power, this greatness, and the writer offers the reminder that "in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together...he is the beginning..."

He is the beginning from which words such as mellifluous (having a smooth flowing sound³), diaphanous (something thin and light⁴), and labyrinthine (intricate, involved⁵) have

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_Christ_the_King

² https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas.html

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mellifluous>

⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaphanous>

⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/labyrinthine>

evolved. He is the beginning of the sky which has no end. If you have ever thought to pause and do more than glance at the firmament for portents of weather to come, especially across a plain, you may have noticed its immensity. For some this triggers cosmophobia, the fear of the vastness of space, or apeirophobia, the fear of infinity - by no means do I wish to bring it on for anyone but I think it is astounding that some people are tuned in in such a way that they begin to fathom the wonder of the immeasurable universe. Jesus is the beginning of this sphere which has no discernable ending.

He is the beginning of each whorl on each fingerprint on each person who has ever walked this earth. He is the beginning of water, which forms crystals and droplets and steam. He is the beginning of the astonishing transformation an egg undergoes when heated. He is the beginning of the fire which produces heat, the spark which jumps between flint and striking object. He is the beginning of the flame which has no shape but tremendous power. And the same for the wind.

He is the beginning of compassion, of sympathy, of love, of tenderness. He is the beginning of passion and justice and protection. He is the beginning of the exquisite feeling of joy, the origin of its effervescence in your chest. He is the beginning of the ache we feel at the sight of mistreatment, of neglect, of violence, of hatred. He is the beginning of the nerve we find to step up and step out on behalf of and alongside the mistreated, the neglected, the persecuted, the oppressed. He is the beginning of binding up wounds, healing of the ill, giving sight to the blind, returning people to community, valuing the worth of others.

There is none like our God, who would forgo power for peace, who would step down to meet us rather than we demand we bow down, who would guide us not only with love but by love. By the standards of this world, we would find God weak to opt for anything over power. By the standards of this world, we believe we rightly bow down to the mighty. By the standards of this world, there is no place for love, for such weakness, in leadership. Jesus came to describe to us and demonstrate for us how worthless our standards are in his reign, how incompatible our standards are with his. On this day, and all the days, let us remember again and again the standards of the one whose power surpasses exponentially and infinitesimally any ruler to whom we might otherwise look. The most powerful chooses

love, creates diversity, tends to the smallest, binds together community. **Christ** is our King, in whose kingdom we are privileged to dwell. Might we give honor to his reign this day, and all the days.

Let us pray: Almighty and powerful God, keep us ever faithful to your standards, we pray.
Amen.