



“Eternal Promises of the King”

Christ the King Sunday
8:15 and 11:00 am Sunday, November 20, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the church's liturgical calendar, the church's worship calendar, this is the Sunday in which we celebrate Christ's Divine Kingship. His ruling authority over all creation. It is the culmination of what began last year with Advent and our preparation to receive the infant King. It is for Christians to recognize that Jesus is more than just a great grugru, or spiritual leader, or great philosopher, or all around nice guy. Jesus is our King, our Messiah, our Lord, who gave his life for the sake of the whole world.

Think of it this way, the Festival of Christ the King operates in a very much like New Year's Eve. As we wait for the beginning of the church year in Advent, it is an opportunity for us to reflect on the year and make resolutions for what we would like our future to be. Who will we be? What will it look like? How will you or I be different? What do you want to improve? The church year is about the future hope that is inaugurated by our King.

The way that takes shape with the Apostle Paul is in the form of intercessions. In his letter that he writes to the Corinthians he offers intercessions to the church. His prayers for how God might gift the church and the early Christians. Now when we pray often we offer intercessions. Intercessions are those prayers that we offer for another person or perhaps a situation that is happening in the world. Intercessory prayer has a long history in the life of the church. We have writings from the earliest church leaders who prayed for others especially those who had left the faith for a variety of reasons. So, the intercessions were prayers to God to bring them back into the fold.

We see that reflected in our gospel reading for today, when even from the cross Jesus prays for another, a criminal who is next to him. Intercession is simple, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* The letter of Colossians is an intercessory prayer for Christian communities and also a Thanksgiving. A Thanksgiving letter for our redemption that we have in the person of Jesus Christ. I'd like you to hear again these promises that are offered, but this time in a translation known as *“The Message”* by Eugene Peterson.

“We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long-haul - not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the glory strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has. God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up for the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit that we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.”

The words of Peterson, who quite frankly I think, any of the translators of the Bible sounds

something like a musical. These words are powerful words for which you and for me to sing about. Indeed, scholars studying the scriptures believe that this passage of Paul's letter is actually an early Christian creed or perhaps a song or poem. Think about that. A two-thousand-year-old song professing Christ our King and lifting up these amazing gifts to Christ church.

It is an example of what's known as high Christology, this understand of Jesus as the Divine Son of God, and for Christians then and today it helps us understand fundamentally how we should view our world. What plans by which you and I should experience the world that God has created. For Paul, it is Christ and only Christ. Christ becomes the lense. Christ becomes our world view in which to make sense of our world. He is the source. He is the start. He is the shaper of our lives. And to do that, Paul shares that Jesus is offering to us promises. Eternal promises of the King to lead us to a changed life. The word that Paul uses here in Greek is *metanoya*, a fundamental visceral change in who we are as God's people. To be bold and faithful in the world. These promises, one leads to another and calls you and I into faithful action. We are called to live these promises of God in our life.

The first promise is **strength**. The world here in Greek is the same root word from which we get the word dynamite. How cool is that. We are given a strength that explodes in creativity and imagination. A strength that sends us forth into the world to be able to do the mission of Jesus.

The second gift that we're offered is **endurance**, which has the connotation of exactly the opposite of cowardice and discouragement. We are to endure, given courage by our Lord to do the work that we must do. To be bold in our proclamation of the gospel and in the ministries that we share.

The third eternal promise is **patience** to remain even keeled. To take one step after another, but know brothers and sisters, if you take one step no matter how small it is, you're still moving forward. We are not called to stand still. In doing all of these things God offers us joy.

So, brothers and sisters, tell a joke, get smiling, Christ is your King and there is nothing that goes on in this world that can change that. No matter what happens in our life, no matter how hard it might be, Christ is our King calling us into a life of faithfulness. Offering us the joys of heaven.

Another promise is **Thanksgiving**. Living a life of gratitude and generosity to God and his purposes, and so this afternoon we will be offering simple meals, so many hands involved offering thanks and giving to others in our community. What God gives us is an inheritance. Another promise, a legacy. Jesus leaves something with us and with his disciples throughout the generation upon generation. This is a precious gift given to us that you and I are to pass on to others, to children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, to neighbors and friends, something for us to carry on and to leave behind, that gift is nothing less than **redemption**. The redemption that Jesus offers with his death on the cross, that you and I are not bound by our past, but we are liberated from it. We are free in baptismal promises, restored and renewed in God's grace. Not just in a future heaven, but here and now, and God does that through his bountiful forgiveness. We are freed from the bondage of sin. So often we try to free ourselves and just get continued mired in the muck, but God offers us this freedom. God offers us new life. God offers us a living relationship with God, and so we are restored by him. And so, we should act like it, we should act like we are free in Christ. We should forgive one another for the faults that we have committed.

These eternal promises that Paul points out are gifts from Jesus our King. They help us grown in our maturity in Christ. They help us become the people that God intended us to be, to help us navigate an unknown future that we can't even imagine. Jesus after all can do this. He is our King and the blessings that he offers transfer us from a world of pain, anxiety, and hopelessness to God's kingdom right here and right now.

In the ancient world when one empire won a victory over another it was customary to take the population of the defeated country and to literally transfer them, transfer them to the conquerors land. Paul on purpose uses this same word because Christ is the conqueror of sin and death. He died on the cross and rose triumphantly, and so he has transferred you and to me into his kingdom. In Him, Paul says, "*All things pull together.*"

And so, as a church, as a congregation we strive for a unified vision of mission and ministry in our congregation and it begins with Christ at the center. Christ at the center of our ministries. Christ at the center of our lives, one bread, one body, one faith, one Lord. Did you hear me? It's Christ at the center. Not your ego, not your pastor, not your desires or your wants, not our traditions, or church building, or music, or even worship. Christ at the center shaping our lives in a new and unexpected way. Serving Jesus our King.

When I was coming over this morning, I turned on usually public radio and the station was playing some gospel music, and this phrase was repeated in a lot of gospel music, repeated over, and over again. It was, "***I need just a little more of Jesus to help me along the way,***" Yes, we all need just a little more of Jesus to help us along the way. And so, brothers and sisters let us reflect on the blessings that God gives us. These eternal promises of our King, and let us live them in our lives, **strength, endurance, patience, joy, thanksgiving, living and leaving a legacy, redemption and forgiveness.** Let Jesus' promise permeate your entire being because after all, he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead so that he may come to have first place in everything. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2016, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org