

Colossians 1:9-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's[a] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, **10** so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. **11** May 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 **12** giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled[b] you[c] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. **13** He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.[d]

The Supremacy of Christ

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; **16** for in[e] 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. **17** He himself is before all things, and in[f] him all things hold together. **18** He 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. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and 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.

First Place

Today is Christ the King Sunday. And there's a fascinating story behind how this day came to be part of the church's calendar. This Sunday was first added to the church's calendar in 1925 by the Roman Catholic church in response to the world becoming more worldly and less God-focused. And we might argue that since 1925, about the time this church was built, the world has become even more worldly and less God-focused, and that this Sunday is especially important today. But this special Sunday also came about because of a very particular problem going on in Mexico where Mexican Christians were suffering persecution. You see the Mexican government was telling the Christians that they owed all their allegiance to the government and not to their God. The church in Mexico remained faithful to God, though, and held public parades throughout the land even though there was significant pushback from the government. During these parades the people would proclaim "Cristo Rey." "Christ is King!" They were really saying not only that Christ is King, but that Christ is the only King! And so, Pope Pius XI declared that these events would be the basis of a holy day to be observed throughout the Roman Catholic Church – and Pope Pius said that this day would be a day to recognize and remember that Christ is King of the Universe! Eventually, many Protestants, including United Methodists adopted this day into their church calendars as well.

We come this day to worship Christ the King, to give thanks for Christ the King, and to think about who and what gets first place in our lives --- we come today to proclaim Cristo Rey!

Now we North Americans don't have much experience with kings and queens, but on the other hand we are fascinated by all things royal, and the royalty we are most familiar are the British royals including the Queen of England. Elizabeth was crowned Queen Elizabeth II in

1953 at the age of 27, and she has sat on the throne ever since. Here's how here coronation was described: millions watched her coronation on international TV as royalty gathered, regiments marched, the fleet lined up in formation as the entourage processed into Westminster Abbey. Adorned in a silk velvet cloak, Elizabeth heard the choir sing Psalm 122 which begins "I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"'" (This day of coronation was a day filled with gladness.) Elizabeth was handed the royal orb (of gold, jewels, pearls), the scepter (studded with diamonds and sapphires), and the royal ring (of sapphire, ruby and fourteen diamonds); then St. Edward's Crown (velvet with 444 precious stones) was placed on her head. She was given dozens of titles (including Her Majesty, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith). Everyone, including her mother, swore allegiance and sang "God Save the Queen." She rode away in a golden carriage. Royalty and the powerful from all over the world rejoiced. (Ministry Matters)

But Christ was a different kind of king. The description of his procession was the opposite of a rich and stately coronation -- it was ugly. He carried his own cross not to a church but to the place of the Skull. He was stripped of his modest garments and mocked. One title, King of the Jews, was jokingly attached to the cross. Jesus sang in screams not Psalm 122 but Psalm 22 -- "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" His hands held not an orb or ring but nails. His scepter was a piercing lance in his side. His crown was of thorns. His mother bowed down in intense sorrow. Mockers cried, "Save yourself." They carried him away and put him in an empty stone tomb. The powers thought they were done with him. (Ministry Matters)

This image of Christ as our King is the exact opposite of what we would expect. Jesus was not the kind of warrior king the Jewish people expected; he didn't come to raise up a mighty army to kill the Romans and let the Israelites live the way they envisioned they would. Jesus wasn't that kind of King. Jesus didn't come to bring down the government of the day. Jesus is instead a counter cultural kind of king. He didn't come to fit into the culture of the day or to be the kind of king that would have existed in his time or in our time. The reign of Christ is unexpected and upside down. And so there are two questions for us to wrestle with this Christ the King Sunday:

If Christ is a different kind of king, what kind of king is he?

And how are we supposed to respond to a king like this?

Paul's letter to the Colossians gives us some answers. Now, Paul wrote the letter to the church in the small city of Colossae (Co - loss - I) located in modern-day Turkey. Paul was afraid that the believers there were being led away from Jesus and toward wrong beliefs and philosophies by false teachers. Among other things, it seems that the Colossians might have been worshiping angels rather than Christ. And so Paul feared that their faith was in jeopardy, and he called them to firm up their faith. In the second half of today's scripture, beginning with verse 15, you will see what scholars define as a hymn celebrating who Christ is. In this hymn, Paul reminds the Colossians and all of us who Christ is ---- he is the very center of God's purposes, he is supreme, he is the King of Kings, he is in first place over all!

Every time I read this scripture I get really fired up. So would you hear these words once more:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; **16** for in[e] 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. **17** He himself is before all things, and in[f] him all things hold together. **18** He 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. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and 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.

Wow! Talk about an all-powerful king who is worthy of our worship! In fact, the word that is repeated over and over is “all.” He is all! And the stunning thing is that Jesus who is “all things” came not to receive glory for himself, but he came for us -- to save us. Jesus lived his life as a servant, and he died brutally so that we might be forgiven, redeemed, and reconciled to God. Jesus came that the lost might be found and the desperate might experience the hope and power of God. Jesus came to show us exactly how we are supposed to love God and exactly how we are to pour out our lives in love of our neighbors. Jesus came to show us how to put God first in everything.

In my studies this week I came across a book written in 1953 by J.B. Phillips called *Your God is Too Small*. I even found a free pdf version of it online - so I encourage you to take a look at it this week. https://thecommonlife.com/files/books/Your_God_is_Too_Small.pdf

Mr. Phillips says that we fail to take seriously the power of Christ to work in our lives and our world -- he says we have an “inadequate conception of God.” He says that instead of seeing God as our all, sometimes we see God as a “resident policeman,” a “parental hangover” or a “grand old man.” Sometimes we view God as “meek and mild.” But my favorite part of his writing is the section where he describes our relationship with God as “God in a box.” He writes that some people have “captured and tamed and trained to their own liking, something that is really far too big ever to be forced into little man-made boxes with neat labels upon them” (Phillips, 22). You see-----we limit the power of God in our lives -- we keep God safely confined and fail to take advantage of this God who is so big that we can’t grasp it! Perhaps we know intellectually that our God is all in all, but don’t we fail to really live as if Christ is King over all and can accomplish all. And I would argue that it is time for us to take God out of the box.

And so the question then becomes who is Christ for us, personally? If we can agree with our intellect that Christ is the “all in all” and that Christ has first place in everything, and that God is an unbelievably mighty God, how are our lives different because of Christ? How does Christ live in us? Are we living as Christs in the world? Does Jesus take first place in our lives or not? The Christians in Mexico marched in the streets to proclaim that Christ is king. How do we do we proclaim Cristo Rey in our ordinary, everyday lives?

Well, Paul does not leave us without advice on this issue. Our union with Christ is not static, but instead involves a journey of growth (NIB, 570). And Paul writes that our response to the King of Kings is to **live lives worthy of the Lord** --- to live lives that are fully pleasing to God. This means our everyday lives of going to work or to school, of caring for our families, spending time with friends --- all of these things can be done in ways that are pleasing to the Lord. And Paul talks about four gifts from God that help us reach this goal of living lives that are fully pleasing to the Lord (verses 9-11). Paul says first that we are to **bear fruit in every good work**. Our faith is supposed to result in action. If the love of God is in us, that love must burst out of us in some tangible way.

Second, Paul prays that the believers will **grow in the knowledge of God**. How might we rearrange our lives to put Christ first in this area? How can we do our part to grow in the knowledge of God? When we do our part, when we seek God, we will find God.

The third thing Paul talks about is **enduring with patience**. The early believers faced trials and persecution aimed at them for following Jesus, and Paul is encouraging them that the ability to endure such things with patience will come from the glorious power of God. While we may not face persecution from the government or from others for our faith, we will face many trials and troubles throughout our lives. Paul assures us that God will give us the strength to endure these times.

And finally, Paul advises the early Jesus-followers to give thanks to God. He says **joyfully give thanks** for three reasons -- because God has given us an inheritance that we don't deserve, he has rescued us from the darkness, he has redeemed and forgiven us. So we respond by joyfully give thanks to God!

Today I joyfully give thanks to God for my mom. You see she lives a life that shouts out "Christ is King." My mom is almost 80. She has lots of health issues. But she refuses to put God in a box, and she has worked tirelessly in the last few years to start and grow a food recovery ministry in her town. She began picking up leftover breakfast food from the local hotel, boxing it up, and taking meals to people in need. Now she has a network of food sources and a network of people who help deliver food on a daily basis to people who don't have enough. Her group averages providing about 800 free meals each month, using food that would otherwise be thrown away. She's made so many new friends -- especially those she shares food with. Her life is filled with joy, and it amazes me that my tiny little mamma shares God's love in such a huge way. My mom relies on a big God---to provide the food and the volunteers, to provide the physical stamina that she needs. Each day she does whatever she is able to do to love some of God's beloveds. The name of Christ the King is proclaimed with each box of food she delivers. And the Lord is surely well-pleased.

Finally, here's the rest of the story about Queen Elizabeth's coronation. While I was reading about it, I found the exact liturgy that was used in 1953. It was a three hour ceremony. And the words and prayers and oaths that were spoken were all written out in the document I found. The directions were included for who would say what and where each person would stand and kneel. During the coronation Elizabeth took an oath, she was anointed with oil, received robes and regalia, she was crowned, and then at the very end, Holy Communion was celebrated. And that is when a most interesting thing happened. Here are the written directions for what was to happen before the communion service began:

The Queen shall descend from her Throne, supported and attended as before, and go to the steps of the Altar, where, delivering her Crown and her Sceptre and Rod to the Lord Great Chamberlain or other appointed Officers to hold, she shall kneel down.

<http://www.oremus.org/liturgy/coronation/cor1953b.html>

And sure enough when I watched the video, before kneeling and receiving the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, the queen removed her crown, handed off her sceptre and rod and knelt down in obedience and humility before Christ the King recognizing him as first in everything.

May we lay whatever crowns we cling to at the feet of Christ our King.

May we live lives that are fully pleasing to God.

And in doing so may our very lives proclaim: Cristo Rey! Christ is King! In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.