

## Christ the King 2016    The exalted Christ participates in creation and reaches out to humanity

We have just sung of Christ the king, “the highest place that heaven affords is his, is his by right, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and heaven’s eternal light.” In Colossians chapter 1, Christ is described in similarly exalted terms as “the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation,..... the head of the body”, and the one through whom “all things hold together” – Christ our king. Christ is established in our hearts and minds as one with the Father, existing in glory beyond the realms of humanity and creation. He is worthy of our praise and adoration, and his authority is such that we may place our confidence and hope in his boundless love and faithfulness, derived from the mercy and loving-kindness of God.

In Colossians 1, we find this expression of the identity of Christ with the Father, “for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. We discover Christ here also to be the Second Adam, ‘Christ Pantocrater’, as the Orthodox would say, presiding over the created world, embracing and redeeming creation, ironically before ever Adam was! In fact, the language of Colossians 1 echoes John chapter 1 when the latter speaks of the activity of the Word at the beginning of time and in the work of creation. John 1 v.1 tells us that the Word was “in the beginning”, he was “with God” and he “was God”; also that “all things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.” In Colossians 1, Christ as the ‘firstborn of all creation’, is described as the one in whom “all things in heaven and on earth were created,.... all things have been created through him and for him”. There is a strong parallel sense of the integral place of Christ in the process and actions of creation. Whereas John speaks of Christ as pre-existent, ‘in the beginning’, and Colossians only of Christ as the ‘firstborn of creation’, we find both passages ascribing to him a relationship with the created world and with humanity which stretches before, beyond and across time. Christ our king is king of creation and the whole inhabited world.

This dimension of the rule of Christ prompts us, of course, to reflect deeply on our stewardship of the earth. In the light of recent predictions of a slackening of US policy on climate change, for example, it is vital that we redouble our efforts at securing the future of the planet, as far as this is within our powers. And our enjoyment of the present Planet Earth series, I trust presses us in this direction. The Kigali agreement a month ago to

progressively limit the use of hydroflourocarbons (HFCs), used primarily in air conditioning and cooling systems, has been hailed as a huge breakthrough. It comes alongside agreement reached to reduce emissions in the aviation industry, and the shipping industry is set to resume its efforts at controlling CO2 emissions in the coming months. At next Saturday's diocesan synod a motion is before us to adopt 'environmental justice' as a key component of our Transforming Church goals – the goals that guide the mission and outreach of parishes across the diocese. As a diocese, we are also in the process of attempting to become an Eco-diocese through meeting nine specified criteria. The most important of these nine is based on churches in parishes becoming eco-churches. There is something here for the PCC to address.

This matter of environmental justice, alerts us to the fact that the glorious king of the universe, who raises our eyes heavenwards, also directs us back to the matters of our earthbound lives. We find here a natural link between incarnation and exaltation.

Another important link is one between exaltation and salvation. The majesty of Christ the king in glory draws us into contemplation. Yet his exalted being is once again not remote. For in the heavenly domain Christ reaches out to share his being, presence and self through his intercession for the world. In Romans Chapter 8 verse 34, we discover that he intercedes for us "at the right hand of God". His grace is forever being vouchsafed to all who turn to him. Paul expresses this in Romans chapter 8 by asking the rhetorical question, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?" The answer is of course 'nothing', (and certainly not being exalted in the heavens), because the flow of love and grace is boundless! Whether it be hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or the sword, "no," says Paul, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that *nothing, neither this nor this nor this*, will be able to separate us from them love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Just as in the incarnate life Jesus reached out to all around him to bring freedom grace and power, so that outreach is undiminished as he reigns in glory. And this is something very wonderful! When did you or I last sit down for a moment and draw strength from the knowledge of God's love for us?... The love of Christ that cannot be shaken?.. To walk in the light of the grace of the love of Christ is a blessing beyond imagining, but it also reaches deep down to restore our aching souls. This is, I think, what the writer to the Colossians means by saying that believers will

“share in the inheritance of the saints in light”. What they enjoy is given to all who turn to Christ now. (As John is often wont to say, eternal life starts now!)

Colossians 1 expresses something else about the outreach of Christ, suggesting that he is neither remote nor disinterested. Our closing verse reminded us that, “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross”. This work of reconciliation, of bringing humanity and creation into a new unity with God and with itself, is elaborated also in verse 13. Of God it says, “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Here we are drawn into the essential dynamism of the work of Christ on the cross to achieve salvation and reconciliation. This is the mystery that lies at the heart of our rejoicing in Christ as king, because he has set us free – indeed humanity and creation have been set free! In his dying and rising, the power of love has been proclaimed, the weight of sin has been lifted and a new order has been set in motion. And we witness this dynamism of forgiveness and reconciliation taking place literally at Calvary in Luke’s account of the crucifixion. As all around mock and jeer, one person turns to Jesus in penitence, namely one of the criminals beside him. Luke’s gospel has recounted many an instance of repentance, of lives turned around: Zacchaeus the tax official, the prodigal son, the grateful leper. The penitent thief is but the last and most notorious in a train of those who have heeded the call of Christ and heard their name called in the announcement of restoration: salvation has come to this house today, this son was lost and now is found he was dead and is alive again, get up and go on your way your faith has made you well. Through Christ the king salvation comes to all who turn in penitence and faith.

We are caught between the heavenly and the earthbound and between our life and the incarnate life. The beauty of this day is that Christ our king reaches relentlessly and compassionately from one domain to the other, releasing us from our many fears, burdens and constraints and empowering our discipleship. Let us walk in the light and love of Christ our king.

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