

Christ The King Sunday
Reign of Christ

November 24, 2019

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Colossians 1:15-20
Luke 23:33-43

A Question of Allegiance



“Christus Rex in Winter Light” by Edward Byrne

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. – Colossians 1:18

She knew they were coming for Thanksgiving and she knew she had a lot to do to get ready. She knew that her brother and sister-in-law and their three children and their labradoodle puppy were arriving on Wednesday. So on Tuesday morning she and her husband sat at Starbucks sipping a White Mocha Frappuccino and making a list on their phones of all the things they had to do to get ready. It was a long list:

- Buy the groceries
- Move the summer clothes on the bed in the guest room
- Subscribe to Disney+ for the kids to have something to watch
- Clean out the refrigerator
- Rake and bag the leaves
- Make the pies
- Clean the bathrooms
- Change the sheets
- Vacuum everything
- Thaw the turkey – don’t forget to thaw the turkey!

They looked at each other and at the growing lists and felt guilty that they hadn’t started getting ready sooner. But they had time. There’s always time, she told herself; after all, they don’t arrive until tomorrow.

And that’s when her phone rang. It was her brother. He said,
“Hi Sis. We’re here!”
And she said, “You’re where?”
“We’re in your driveway. Where are you?”

Whaaat? She nearly shouted into the phone,
“But ... but you’re not supposed to be here until tomorrow!”

Calmly her brother said,

“No Sis, check your texts messages. We talked about this. I told you we were coming today.”

She hung up the phone, looked wide-eyed at her husband. Then she jumped up, nearly turning over her chair and spilling her expensive coffee all over the table. When she did, six other Starbucks customers momentarily looked up from their phones to see two frantic people nearly sprinting out of the store saying to each other:

“It can’t be today. We’re not ready today! Not today.”ⁱ

In the gospel of Luke there is no more comforting or confrontational word than “today.” The Greek is σήμερον, say-mer-on, which is fun to say...and Luke says it often.

When we hear the angels’ announcement at Christmas:

*For unto you is born today in the city of David
a Savior who is Christ the Lord.*ⁱⁱ

And when Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, about the Kingdom of God, how the Messiah will bring good news to the poor, liberty for the oppressed, and sight to the spiritually blind, he says:

*Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*ⁱⁱⁱ

To Zacchaeus, the crooked tax man, who vowed to return everything he had stolen and give half of what he had to the poor, Jesus said:

Today salvation has come to your house.^{iv}

To the thief beside him on the cross, he said:

Today you will be with me in Paradise.

Not tomorrow or the next day, not someday in the sweet by and by, not when it’s more convenient, but σήμερον. Today.

Do you hear that? “We follow a Savior who looks us in the eye and says, ‘Today, I want you with me. Today I’ll be with you.’”^v

But if we’re honest some of us feel like that couple in Starbucks. We know that we should be thrilled to know he’s with us, that he wants us to be with him. We should welcome him but we don’t feel ready. There are things we need to do first. And the idea that Christ, our king, wants us with him today ... if we’re honest...

Some of us may be like the leaders in the story from Luke. We can’t figure out how a crucified Savior makes sense:

He saved others let him save himself.

Some of us are like the mocking soldiers.

In fact, some version of those guys may be coming to your house for Thanksgiving. Today there's a very good chance that someone you love is having a very hard time believing that Jesus is the real deal; they even may be hostile toward Christ and the church. It hurts your heart that they do not fear God (by "fear" Luke means "show respect for" God.) Maybe you work or go to school with someone like that. Listen; don't be afraid of their doubt. Fred Buechner said, "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it alive and moving."^{vi} When the time is right, and you can do it with love, ask your friend or loved one what kind of God they don't believe in. Chances are you don't believe in that kind of God either. And never be afraid to share your own faith, always, always with love.

Most of us are here at worship because we at least are trying to fear God. In fact, we want to give our lives to Jesus, though sometimes we don't feel ready to do that. After all there are planes to catch, and bills to pay, tests to take; we have lots of stuff to do. Jesus looks at us in love and says, "Come be with me" and we want to say "Okay! But not today Jesus." I can't. I'll follow you later, when I get caught up, when things slow down for me. But they never do.

It's a question of allegiance. Whether we know it or not, we all pledge our allegiance to someone or something every day – to your teachers, your boss, to your coaches, or friends, to family, to entertainment, or our country, or some cause. Those are all good things, but they are not the main thing – they're not the reason you were born.

Someone or something is your ultimate allegiance, someone or something that gives us purpose. For some it's success or power. I like to call that "influence." It sounds better, but it doesn't get me off the hook. For others their ultimate allegiance is to money, or knowledge, or beauty, popularity, or love. Sadly for some it's anger and cynicism.

The scriptures say very clearly that you and I were not made for all those things. We were made by Christ, for Christ. HE is our purpose, our ultimate allegiance, and our God. Listen to Colossians, chapter 1, verses 15-20.

*[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation;
for 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.*

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

*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.

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven,
by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The Bible says that we were made by Jesus, and for Jesus. We were born to worship him. That's the reason all our pleasures leave us feeling incomplete. We keep looking, keep on striving, keep on buying, but nothing fully delivers. Nothing brings that deep soul satisfaction we are looking for.

Back in 2005, the brilliant and often tortured novelist David Foster Wallace gave the commencement speech at Kenyon College. Here's part of what he said:

“Everybody worships. The only choice we get to make is what to worship. And the compelling reason for ... choosing spiritual worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough ...

Worship your body and beauty ...and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

Worship power and you will end up feeling weak and afraid. You will never have enough ...[control] over others to numb your own fear.

Worship your intellect, being ... smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. ...

They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day ... without ever being aware of what you're doing.”^{vii}

True. C.S. Lewis famously wrote:

“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”^{viii}

We were made for Christ.

It's a question of allegiance. Christ is our king. There's a scene in the book and TV series *Outlander*. Set in 18th century Scotland, the scene is the gathering of Clan MacKenzie. There are bagpipes filling the air with music in the great hall. The clan chief, Colum MacKenzie enters, resplendent in his tartan. One by one each of the men kneels before Colum and swears an oath of allegiance. Then each one takes a drink from a single cup.

That's not so different from what we do here week by week. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what or whom we worship.

Jesus calls you and me to worship today. When you pledge your life to him; put him at the center, you are doing what you were made to do, and you are right where you are supposed to be.

Have you seen this cartoon? Don't miss the boat!

Jesus says, "I want you onboard today." Don't turn him away because you think you have other things to do.

Instead, give him first place in everything. Come to his table and pledge your allegiance to him.

Too often we say, "It can't be today! I'm not ready today." We tell ourselves that a living relationship with Christ is better put off – until we have more time for things like that. But remember: on the cross Jesus didn't say to the man beside him:



"Possibly one of these day you'll be with me." He said, "Today."

In the synagogue at Nazareth he didn't say:

"Someday this scripture will be fulfilled in your hearing." He said, "Today."

He didn't say to Zacchaeus:

"Sooner or later, salvation may come to your house." He said, "Today."

On Christmas, the angels didn't say:

"Maybe, eventually a Savior will be born for you." No. They announced, *For unto you is born this day ... a Savior who is Christ the Lord.* Today.

All that means one thing: Christ is King, Savior and Lord -- Today. And friends, this is not the time for neutrality.

Either you're with him or you're not. He means to set you free today –

Free from the fear,
and the feeling that you are never good enough.

Free from disappointment

and the grief.

Free from the pointlessness.

He wants you and me, and all of us to be:

Free to trust,
Free to live and love,
because Christ is our perfect king. He's alive in us – today.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ Michael Renniger, from a sermon, "Today" preached at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond, VA I am indebted to Fr Renniger for many of the ideas included in this sermon

ⁱⁱ Luke 2:11

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 4:21

^{iv} Luke 19:9

^v Renniger, op. cit.

^{vi} Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words*, HarperOne, 2004, 85.

^{vii} David Foster Wallace, Kenyon Commencement Address, May 21, 2005

^{viii} C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, HarperOne, 2015, 135.