Sermon Col. 1:11-20; Christ the King Sunday, Nov. 24, 2019; Year C

Let me tell you what I nearly did this week. I very nearly planned today’s entire service without a single Thanksgiving hymn. Which would be terrible. We would have missed them. And nobody wants to sing these hymns the Sunday after Thanksgiving. It’s a little anti-climactic.

And some of these songs, truly MOST of these songs only get sung once a year. But what would Thanksgiving week be without “We Gather Together to Ask the Lord’s Blessing”? We actually had printed a copy and proofread the bulletins and approved them before I realized it.

But we caught it in time to make the change, thank goodness! And when I DID realize it, I had a hard time choosing, so we just worked in one extra hymn so we could sing them all.

In my defense, the lectionary is all about Christ the King Sunday, not at all about Thanksgiving. And even though Christ the King Sunday’s not a huge cultural holiday, it’s a really important Church holiday. Today, Christ the King Sunday, is the last day of the Christian Calendar. Jesus said I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. And we mirror that in our Christian calendar—we begin and end our Christian year in Christ.

The Church calendar begins on the first Sunday of Advent when we anticipate the coming of the Christ child. The Church calendar ends with Christ the King Sunday. This day, the last day of the calendar, is sort of our Christian calendar New Year’s Eve. It’s a celebration that focuses on the divinity of Christ, the one who is high and lifted up—the King of all.

And today’s passage from Colossians is a beautiful Christ hymn. It’s written to a church that’s struggling with issues of fitting what they’ve heard about who Christ is into their gnostic culture. In the great balancing scale, Gnosticism values the spiritual things of life and devalues the physical things of life.

In Jesus’s day it was a worldview that couldn’t believe that God ***could be*** fully human. ***God*** was too great to take on a ***human*** form. And this text uses high language to describe Jesus, but also says, “Hey Everybody, he was high and lifted up, but he was human too.”

And so, Paul’s argument for the church is this: instead of fitting Christ into your worldview, change your worldview. Christ is the center. Christ is the orientation. Our job is to fit the rest of life into the Christ-centered worldview. And there’s a great word that Paul uses to give that image, that metaphor of what he’s trying to say.

Paul tells the Colossians in verse 13, God has “transferred us into the kingdom of his Beloved Son…”[[1]](#footnote-1) The Greek verb for “transferred” indicates being taken captive by a foreign power and moved to a new land. It’s his way of saying, “We’re not in Kansas anymore.”

With Christ, and living in Christ’s kingdom, everything is different. But in Christ, with Christ at the center, all things hold together. Listen for the Word of the Lord from Colossians 1:11-20:

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 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He 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 himself 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 to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Friends this is the Word of the Lord; **Thanks be to God.**

I like that image of being transferred into his kingdom, scooped up and plopped down in a completely different arrangement of life. And this week we can get a little bit of a feel for that—for most of us our routine will be rearranged this week. Whether we’re traveling to be with family, maybe (like me) a lot of us are taking some time off work, or maybe some are taking part in the Black Friday shopping madness.

But for most of us this week is at least slightly rearranged. My Phillip came home from work on Friday which was his last work day of the week and announced, “I have never in my 38 years of work been able to take off the entire week of Thanksgiving.” And then he said, “And this is my last chance!” Because this time next year if all goes to plan, he’ll be retired. Thirty-eight years. First time he’s been off all week. That’s something to celebrate.

And Thanksgiving definitely is a time to celebrate—to gather with friends and family, to celebrate bounty, and to thank God. Our household is thanking God for what can only be called a miraculous healing for Preston this year. My nephew John has had strange and serious neurological symptoms this year, but all seems to be clear with him now. In so many ways and for many reasons, we give thanks to God.

And we have so much to be thankful for here together as well. It’s been a good year of service in this church. Today we’ll get the sanctuary ready for Advent. Decorating together is always a fun way to get ready. But getting ready for Advent isn’t just about getting up the tree and picking out hymns.

What we want to do as we close out this year of the Christian calendar and then next week as we start a new year, we want most of all to keep Christ central. It’s a good time to reflect, Are we keeping Christ as the center of our lives? I bet most of us would agree that we can do better. This is a good time to be intentional about what’s in the center of our lives and who is in the center of our lives.

And here I have to stop and wonder. What would the world be like if all Christians lived truly with Christ in the center in all our relationships? What would the Church look like? It’d be pretty awesome. It’s a great endeavor for this, the “New Year’s Eve” of the church calendar. It’s a good time for some New Year’s Resolutions.

It’s a time to ask: Are we demonstrating in all areas a new quality of life—with Christ at the center? If not, it’s time for some work. It’s time to call ourselves up to a higher place. And Advent is a good time to begin that.

I know it’s weird talking about New Year’s Eve during Thanksgiving week and just before Advent. But the focus for each one is similar—keeping the central things central. Serving God by serving others. Taking ourselves less seriously, and taking the needs of others more seriously. Meeting people in the hall or in the street, or in the home, meeting them with more concern about how they’re doing than how we’re doing. And then acting on that.

Christ in the center **demands** that our lives demonstrate a new quality of life. Demonstrate—something you can see—we’re called to demonstrate that Christ is the center. Let that be our corporate resolution together. And what a wonderful year we’ll have ahead of us then. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Colossians 1:13, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)