

Sermon Christ the King, Born in a Manger
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Olivet Congregational Church UCC
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SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 65: 17-25

The Glorious New Creation

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,

while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

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.

Luke 23: 33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.']] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying,

‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

Sermon “Christ the King, Born in a Manger”

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, our thoughts go to our plans for Thanksgiving – lots of preparation for that special meal with turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce and all the other fixings, maybe even to mincemeat pie. I don’t know about you but I don’t know see mincemeat pie on the grocery store shelves at any other time of year. Though I must admit, I don’t look for it over the summer. And of course, what Thanksgiving is complete without those amazing parades with creative floats made from rose petals or balloons as big as buildings. And of course, not to be left out of our Thanksgiving thoughts, there’s football.

Then on Thanksgiving Day, whether it’s when we awaken, when we prepare our meals, or when we sit down to eat, we give thanks - for our food, family and friends - for those we love whether we are able to be with them in person or they are now with us in spirit. We hold our beloved in our hearts. We are grateful.

Then, at some point, our hearts turn to Christmas. After all, Christmas trees, stockings, and decorations are already in the stores. And this coming Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. So the church will be preparing for Christmas too.

So why, then, this reading from Luke? What’s gives with this reading from Luke that we usually hear on Good Friday, this reading about Jesus’ crucifixion.

Well, the lectionary places the story of Jesus’ crucifixion here at the end of the church year, to remind us – not of that baby whom we will preparing to receive during the next 4 weeks of Advent. The lectionary reminds us of Jesus, to look back upon the life of Jesus, that Jesus is both human and divine. Our reading reminds us that Jesus was the Messiah, who died as a common criminal on a

cross, with a criminal on each side of him and a crowd standing in front of him, questioning who he was, and mocking him.

It's hardly what we want to think of as we wait for that baby in a manger to be born. But it's the story of Jesus' life, the story of our faith.

In his letter to those early Christians of Colossae, Paul reminds them that Jesus was God, in every sense of the word, present at creation and as that human infant. Jesus is the human image of the God that we cannot see, Jesus was the first born of creation who was at creation and later became human and even died. Jesus then became the first born from death, the first to rise again – defeating death.

Paul reminds those early Christians that Jesus should be worshiped above all on earth because he is King above all rulers and above all leaders. But he did not get to be king above defeating other kings in battle. Through Jesus all of creation was reconciled to God through the cross.

On that cross hung Jesus, who could have responded with anger and violence to those who hung him on the cross, but instead he offered radical forgiveness. Instead of condemning them, instead of calling on his Father to punish them, Jesus called upon his Father to forgive them. Jesus called out "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

And to the criminal crucified beside him, who simply asked to be remembered by Jesus in his Kingdom, Jesus granted assurance that he will be with Jesus that very day. The criminal will be with Jesus, just for the asking.

We worship a loving God who is Loving, who chose to turn the world upside down by becoming human. Our God, a King, chose not to be born in luxury, but instead in a stable where his crib would be a feeding trough for animals. He chose to offer love and forgiveness rather than hatred and violence.

He chose to be a Rabbi, a teacher, who had no home but wandered the Judean countryside to teach revolutionary messages like

Loving neighbors by reaching out even to those who were outcasts or enemies

Healing the lame, the blind, those possessed by demons, even those who were considered unclean,
Refusing to cast the first stone at sinners like the woman who was caught in adultery
Living, not to accumulate more and more, but to share and serve
Forgiving like the father of a prodigal son who opened his heart and arms to hug his wayward son
Setting love as the law above all laws, the law to which all laws are subject in the eyes of God

Such is the mercy, forgiveness and grace that Jesus offers. Such is the extraordinary love of Jesus that we also receive. It gives us hope.

This, the last Sunday of the Church year, is known as Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ Sunday. We are called to praise and honor Jesus, our King, the Word at Creation who was born as that helpless infant placed in a manger, who lived and loved in a radical and extraordinary way, was crucified, but conquered death and is with us now and will continue to be with us all our lives and even when we die- offering us everlasting life.

Jesus is the one who we as Christians are called to worship, to follow, and to conform our lives to, and to love in return. His is the kingdom we work to help build on earth as it is in heaven.

As we look to God's kin-dom with hope we hear these words of Isaiah. He shared God's words to his people as they struggled on their return to Jerusalem from Exile, from captivity in Babylon, to their homeland which was destroyed. I imagine it could be something like the people of Ukraine returning to cities that were bombarded or people returning to their homes after hurricanes. The situation would have been overwhelming. But through these words in Isaiah, God was giving his people hope. We can feel that hope in these words, words about Creating a new heavens and a new earth;
Where God's people will "be glad and rejoice forever in what God is creating...
Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
God will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in God's people;

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit...
and God's chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD— and their descendants as well.
“Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.”

We can hold onto the dream of that world of which God speaks and desires for God's people. We can hold onto that world, turning to the life of Jesus and working with the risen Christ to usher in such a new world as we care for the vulnerable, reach out to better understand those with whom we disagree, and work together to combat prejudice, bring justice and peace, and to offer joy and hope.

As we close out this church year, we reflect upon Jesus our God - the living, breathing example of love.

As we approach Advent we will again look forward to Jesus being born for us and in us again and again and again.

So, let us go into Thanksgiving filled with gratitude for so much more than family, friends, food, floats, and football. Let us give thanks for all that we have received from Jesus. It's a lot to be thankful for – mercy, forgiveness, healing, love, and hope. It's what brings us here – week after week, season after season, year after year. It's what strengthens us to help build God's kin-dom on earth. A new Jerusalem, one of peace, joy, righteousness, love and hope.
So we say “Thank you, God.” Amen.

