

Central United Church, Windsor
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King of Kindness: Colossians 1:9-20

If you could have dinner with any famous person, dead or alive, who do you think you would choose and why?

I don't know if there are any people here who are fans of the Royal Family. Personally speaking, I am not one to really keep up on Royal Gossip though I do know the basics of what is happening with them. Prince Harry has done some amazing work with mental health and racial justice, and Prince William has certainly done some innovative work with climate change, however, out of all of them, I believe the Queen to be the most special. I actually had the opportunity of seeing the Queen in real life when I was in Scotland and I must say that she is even shorter in person.

Obviously, the Queen did not talk to me. To her, I am nobody. She was on her way to church and while crowds gathered around to take a peek and snap up a photo, she was simply preoccupied with the place she was going. She didn't even turn around to do her classic wave. There was no possible way to get closer to her - guards were on either side and if anyone made a move, they were armed. That's simply the truth of it: the Queen is a very Godly, righteous, and spiritual woman, but at the end of the day she is royalty, and people who are royal simply do not talk to commoners like us. They don't know anything about us. They don't know who we are, what our name is or what we do for a living. They don't know who we're related to, who else we know, or what our hobbies are. And here's the sad truth of it all: they don't actually care.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and we are talking about another person who was Royalty but who actually does know and care about us deeply. The Bible says that Jesus knows every single hair on our head, that he knows our comings and goings, and most importantly that he cares and empathizes with our struggles and burdens because he has experienced all the trials we have in our lives. In Hebrews 4:15 we read, **“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was tempted in all points as we are, yet did not sin.”** And it is exactly because of Christ's empathy towards us and the weaknesses we present, that he urges us to **“cast our anxiety on him because he cares for us”** 1 Peter 5:7.

In preparing for my sermon this morning, I found myself struggling with a few different pieces of this Sunday. On the one hand, I was struck between acknowledging the reign and rule of Christ in his supremacy, but on the other hand, I also was reminded of times when the reign of Christendom has been used to coerce, control, and force submission on others. My mind went to images such as the Crusades, the Residential Schools, and even people who remain stuck in unhealthy relationships or marriages due to a misunderstanding of certain Scriptural truths.

As a chaplain, I do many cold calls. I walk into people's hospital rooms unannounced, introduce myself, and hope that they might like to have a conversation with me. Many people are eager to talk and share and there are always at least a handful of Christians on the unit who sometimes want me to pray and read Scripture with them. However, guaranteed there will also always be patients who want nothing to do with me and are even angry that I asked. Spiritual care in a hospital setting is not the same as religious care. One does not have to be religious to benefit from the listening ear and services of a chaplain, but unfortunately, some people are so tainted by a bad experience of the church that any mention of God, religion, or spirituality will turn them right off. This deeply saddens me as I believe everyone is spiritual at their core, however, I also must respect their wishes. It just goes to show me how deep the wounds of Christianity have been inflicted on some people that due to a bad experience here or there they have written off church and their faith completely.

However, Christ's rule is not about any of those things at all. Christ's reign is not about subjecting people to believe in something or demanding devotion, after all, it is impossible to force faith. Rather, Christ is the King of Kindness, the Lord of Love, and a Magistrate of Mercy.

In Christ, we see a cohesive force which holds the universe together, a life-source that brings beauty and joy within creation. Christ is both the Creator and Preserver - he is the one who forms and the one who sustains. And in reading verse 13, **“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves”** my mind was immediately drawn to those stories many of us enjoyed as children where a knight in shining armour rescues a damsel in distress who is stuck in the castle prison guarded by a fire breathing dragon. It's that type of heroic and daring act of courage that Christ has used to rescue us from the shackles which bind us.

It might be helpful to have a bit of background about the Colossians so that we can better understand why Paul wrote this particular letter to them. Colossae was a very culturally diverse town located in modern day Turkey, mostly made up of Gentiles, though there was a strong contingent of Jews (scholars suggest up to 50,000 of them). Colossae used to be a very powerful town between the 8th Century BC and the 6th Century AD. It was a hub of immigration, artistic expression, and skilled craftspeople, and although the major industry lay in ceramics and pottery, there was also great potential for farming as the land was good. The fact that there was so much immigration, also meant that the town was rich with cultural diversity.

However, by the time Paul got around to writing this letter (around 60 AD), the town had all but shriveled up and was relatively small. Therefore, many scholars suggest that this was perhaps the least important church addressed by Paul. The Colossian believers met in a small house church, but even though they were small they were mighty. Paul actually was not the one who planted this church and it is likely that he never even visited it. The house church was actually founded by a young man named Epaphras who heard the Gospel message in Ephesus and then went on to plant a church. Epaphras visited Paul during his first Roman Imprisonment and asked Paul

for advice on how to best lead his church. This small church was passionate, committed, and its reputation preceded it. This community didn't let size hinder it - it continued to be faithful in its love and service to others, yet, it was also met with challenges.

There were some from outside the church who wanted to present a different Gospel than the one the Colossians knew so well. The outside culture pressured the Colossians to accept new doctrines such as **Gnosticism** which suggests that salvation is purely based in knowledge rather than in relationship, **Asceticism** which is the belief that the human body is evil and that human needs must be destroyed in a pursuit of spiritual things, and **Sophistry** which is basically intentional deception through philosophical means. The Colossians now faced a dilemma: how to stay true to the uniqueness of the Gospel, while also desiring to be liked by those around them. However, Epaphras had very good insight and wisdom, for at this point, the topic had not gotten totally out of hand, but Epaphras wanted some encouragement and advice for how to deal with it when push finally came to shove.

We also live in similar times, just like the Colossians our world is also very diverse and complex. A quick Google search revealed that there are over 4,000 world religions and even in Christianity alone there are thousands of unique denominations. We know that the Body of Christ is made up of many people from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and our backgrounds - where we were raised, how we were brought up, and the values instilled to us in childhood and adolescence generally inform our theology to one degree or another. So, it makes sense that in any church there would be differences of opinion on many different topics. How do we continue to live out our faith and find unity, even when we hear differing views from different sides?

We recognize that faith is spacious and expansive. That in God's realm there is room for all - that the Spirit of God is always inclusive, never exclusive. That it is open to all who seek after God - that God makes himself known, he does not hide who he is. And God is revealed in more than just the Bible for not everyone connects right away to the God of the Bible, he is even revealed in creation. Romans 1:20 tells us, **"For since the Creation of the World, God's invisible qualities, divine nature, and eternal power have been seen."**

The Passion Translation calls us "reservoirs of wisdom and spiritual understanding." Yet, we are not simply a lake that stands still, rather God uses us to be a source to draw water from to nourish others with. Living in the true knowledge of God's rule and reign is inseparable from living in harmony with it. It is this life source which calls us to reconciliation - the righting and re-establishing of relationships. I am currently taking a course called "Indigenous Realities Within the Christian Church" by Dr. Ray Aldred and in speaking to a relational worldview he stated that a just ruler is someone who can heal the brokenness caused by injustice. That a true ruler is one who can affirm without assimilating.

For a long time, Christendom wanted people to be "like" them. But being like something doesn't actually mean being something. If you look at a twenty dollar bill

or a stamp, you might see the image of the Queen on it, but it's not actually the Queen. It is her likeness but it isn't her. Instead, God calls us to be a manifestation of who he is. A manifestation means an embodiment. That we are so alike to Christ that when people look at us, they see Christ. We are not just Christ-like having some of his features or attributes, but we display ourselves as those who are in Christ.

Choosing to engage in our Christian heritage of Christ being the King and us being heirs to his throne, a part of the Castle realm, does not mean we have to exclude all others who are not like us, rather it means that we welcome them in. That we do not see ourselves as supreme in rank, but rather as servants. That we claim the access to God's wealth we already have through Christ so that we do not have to chase after the world's corporate greed. Today's passage at first may have seemed highly theological, but in reality we don't have to over-spiritualize it. It is encouragement for us here today, it is the ultimate invitation for all others to meet with Christ. In closing today, I want to leave you with one final thought from The Message Bible. In Colossians 1:10 Paul writes, **“As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work.”**

As we continue to seek after God's original intent for our lives, we will discover restoration of our souls and of our world. As we continue to believe that God qualifies us for the tasks which He has called us to, we will find the strength to continue towards the goals set in our hearts regardless of obstacles in our path, and the patience to stand firm against opposition without giving up. God will grace us with the wisdom of how to deal in difficult situations and with difficult people. And ultimately, we will be transferred to the Kingdom of the Son He loves - the land of our soul, released from legalism, where darkness is defeated and where only hope and freedom reign.

May it be so. Amen.