

Sunday, November 20 – CHRIST THE KING

Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer

Sermon Title: “The image of the invisible God”

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:11-20

(The second reading for next Sunday will be Jeremiah 23:1-6.)

Note: For those of you who follow the church calendar, this Sunday is known as **Christ the King**. And the significance for us is twofold: 1) the church calendar comes to an end, and a new year begins with the First Sunday of Advent the following week, and 2) the church celebrates *in advance* the final victory of Christ. Related to #2, some of the best hymns of the church are sung on this Sunday – “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” “Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart,” “At the Name of Jesus,” “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” “Rejoice the Lord Is King,” etc.

1. Let no one miss the power, punch, and sheer wonder of what the apostle Paul writes in these verses! He is making an extraordinary claim about Jesus of Nazareth – not that he was a miracle worker (ho-hum), not that he was a great teacher (boring!), but that he was the One with all supremacy over heaven and earth, all power and might that there ever was or ever will be. He made everything that exists. He redeemed everything that exists. Everything. *Ta panta* in the Greek means EVERYTHING, A to Z, top to bottom. Think about this: it is such an outrageous claim that it is either 100 percent correct or 100 percent lunacy. Where do you stand on it?
2. But this is more than an abstract theological claim. This is a claim with enormous practical significance. In vs. 11-14 Paul gives the Colossians a practical application: because of Christ, they have had a change of spiritual address. They have been relocated from a kingdom of darkness and death into a kingdom of light and life. They exchanged a postal code of misery for a new land where this Cosmic Christ is all in all. How would the apostle Paul have described the change that has come to us because of what Christ has done? How has your postal code changed?
3. William Barclay, in his commentary on Colossians, points out that Paul uses the Greek word *eikon* which in English appears as “icon” (those little things on the computer screen that we tap on). The issue is that an icon can be a “representation” of something or a “manifestation.” Barclay writes that Paul clearly sees Christ as “the perfect manifestation” of God. “To see what God is like,” he writes, “we must look at Jesus.” This too is an astonishing claim. Think about it: everything we would want to know about God, everything that is important to know about God, was present (is present) in Christ because Christ perfectly manifests God to us. Take a moment to reflect on Christ and what his person tells us about God.
4. Here is an extension of the thought introduced in #3. In Genesis 1:26-27 we learn that human beings were created in the “image” of God. What’s amazing about this is that we too are “icons” – *eikon* – representations or maybe manifestations of God. At least that was what we were meant to be. Sin of course entered the world and distorted the image, but the image is only distorted (not absent). So, here’s the significance: Jesus came among us as a kind of “double revelation.” He revealed to us the nature of God, but he also revealed to us what it means to be human, what we were created to be. Jesus was not just divine; he was truly and indelibly human. So, take a look at him and decide for yourself what that means: what does Jesus show us about what it means to be human?
5. Want to learn another Greek word? In vs. 19 Paul refers to Jesus as the *pleroma* or “fullness” of God. Fullness or completeness – so, in case you are tempted to think of Jesus as an icon, a tiny picture of God, please think again. Jesus is not a tiny picture, but a full portrait of God. In him nothing is left out. He is the full and final revelation of God. Nothing more is needed. Have you heard people say that the God of the New Testament seems so different from the God of the Old Testament? What they are saying – often – is that the God of the Old Testament seems angry, full of judgment, and scary, while the God of the New Testament is like Jesus, in other words, full of compassion, mercy, and love. Christian doctrine teaches that there is only one God, of course, so how do you reconcile these two different pictures. Maybe the God of the Old Testament is more merciful and loving than we sometimes imagine, and maybe the God of the New Testament is a bit more concerned with justice than we sometimes think!