

The Festival of Christ the King • November 21, 2010

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Colossians 1:11-20

"The Beginning is the End is the Beginning"

"Jesus isn't King. God has many names, so it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're faithful to whatever you believe in. All roads lead to spiritual enlightenment. It's ignorant to say that there's only one true King, because that would mean that people who disagree with you are wrong. And who are you to say that someone else's beliefs are wrong? Jesus isn't King." You've probably heard that argument – or something very much like it – so often and so vigorously stated that you might even start to unthinkingly believe it yourself. "Jesus isn't King. Or if he is a king, he's not the only one." That's what spirit of our culture is saying to us day in and day out at school, at work, and in much of what's out there in the media. It's bombarding young and old, calling them to abandon any claim to truth, let alone "the" truth. But there is a Truth, and that Truth comes to us now through God's own word. People must have a king, and many in this world follow a king who does go by many names, including the name "Satan." Above this pretender to the throne, though, is the true King whose name we celebrate today: Jesus.

Jesus is the beginning. He is the beginning of all. Through him, in him, everything that is was created. As the agent of creation, he is therefore above and before everything and everyone else. The solar system, the ecosystem, the nervous system – all these owe their existence to the work of the Son of God. What's more, the universe wasn't just created by the Son; he sustains it. This is what St. Paul is sharing with us today when he writes: *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* Christ is king, in part because Christ is creator. He is the one who keeps things going, holding the fabric of the universe together, staying the stars and planets in their orbits. You may have heard of the scientists over in Europe that are working on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the world's biggest, highest-powered particle accelerator. One of the hopes of this project is that it will allow researchers to uncover some of the most fundamental rules of physics, how and why the universe works the way it does. But like all of our scientific research, the LHC won't invent new rules for the universe. It's just a tool that might help us to understand the rules that are already in place, rules that are all part of the Creator's handiwork. He's the one who established the order and who keeps it all going. You and I are part of God's Creation. Even the ancient Greeks knew that. When he visited Athens, Paul cited their own poets who'd written, *"In him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28). The Creator of all, the One from whom everyone and everything comes, has authority over all. He, as Creator, the beginning of all, is King.

Jesus is the end. He is the end of our guilt, the end of our sin, the end of Satan's power. That's why our Gospel reading today is St. Luke's Good Friday account of Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus, the only person ever to live a life that perfectly did what God expects from each human being, met the end of that life nailed to a cross between two criminals – literally, "evildoers." Today, on the day that we know as the "Festival of Christ the King," God points us to the cross on which Christ died. Think about that. What kind of king do you need: a figurehead, or one who fights for his people? Jesus fought Satan to bring freedom to people who had sold themselves into slavery. You and I are those for whom Jesus fought, and he won the battle on the cross. Again, Paul writes, just beyond today's reading: *"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him..."* We belong with the evildoers, but Jesus took our place in between them on Good Friday. There, he made peace with God through the blood of his cross, out of his astonishing love for even evildoers like you and me. This is why Christians point to the cross on this day celebrating

Christ the King, because the cross is Jesus' throne. From his throne, the King reigns in the lives of his people.

Jesus is the beginning. *"He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."* He is the beginning of new life for his people. You see, God has always wanted to be in conversation and community with us, His creatures. So He did what was necessary, according to the rules that He established in Creation, offering up that perfect sacrifice on the cross, to give you and me a new beginning, restoring our conversation and community with Him. The interference that kept us from connecting with God is silenced in Jesus' presence. The King has won the battle, His people are free. So then what happens? Do we the people go back to doing things the old way, like when we were slaves? We might – especially if we aren't looking to Jesus as the one true king. In Jesus alone do we have hope for a new beginning, one that isn't just a continuation of the past that's come before. And there's so much past that has come before! How do you have a new beginning in the real world, where people remember what you've done and what you've said? When Jesus is preeminent – in first place – in your life, when he is your one King, things change, because he has changed you. You'll still struggle. There are still consequences for how we live in relationship to other people. But you can begin every new day in hope, remembering the forgiveness that the King has won for you, and you can look ahead to living life in full, doing those things that God has given you to do. When you look to Jesus on his throne, you see the world through new eyes.

As Christians, as people who call Christ the "King," **you have a new beginning to share with the people in your life.** People might say to you, "Jesus isn't King." Ask them what they believe, then ask if they'd like to hear about your faith. Point them to the cross. Have them consider that we live in an imperfect and broken world because of our broken relationship with God. Let them know that Jesus came to fix that broken relationship for all evildoers, you and me included. Share with them that Jesus freely took your guilt and the guilt of the whole broken world onto the cross and put an end to it. Speak the truth that they, too, can have a new beginning, with Jesus as King in their life, life which doesn't end at the grave. Be open and honest; stand firm along with St. Paul, strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might.

The beginning is the end is the beginning. Jesus is our source; in him we have our beginning. Jesus is our redeemer; in him we have the end of our guilt and sin. Jesus is our hope; in him we have a new beginning for this age and into the age to come. Today as we celebrate the end of the church year and look ahead to the beginning of a new reality through Jesus, I pray that we would all live each day as if it would be our last; not to go out with a big bang of extravagance, but to be and do all that we can as human beings who are forgiven and free in Christ.

With joy and thanksgiving, singing, praying, and living, **let's go out into the world as the people of the one true King: Jesus!**

Amen.