

Amen. This Christ the King day, we will focus on the reading from Colossians.

I usually like to begin a sermon with a verse or phrase from the reading to focus us on a particular aspect of the text – so what’s the theme verse today? Sometimes one verse just won’t do. When the planners of the national LCMS Youth Gathering got together to decide on a theme verse, they decided to go bigger. So imagine being in Minute Maid Park in Houston Texas with around 20,000 other Lutheran followers of Christ. There’s a continuous strip of LCD screens that wraps around the entire seating area – normally these would be used to show ticker-tape game updates or to display Coca-Cola, Bud Light, Lexus, etc. But that day when we walked into the stadium, there was one continuous message beginning at one end and stretching across all those screens to the other end of the park: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

So that’s what we’re talking about today! Now, there wasn’t an easy-to-remember theme verse but there was a theme and that was “In all things.” And if you notice the phrase “all things” is repeated many times in those verses! So this Christ the King day we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is not just “Lord of my life,” or “Lord of those who accept him” or even “Lord of good things.” He is Lord over *all things*. Actually the full name of this holiday, you might remember, is “The Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.”

So the story we tell today is the story of the whole universe; the story of all things. In many ways we are a storytelling culture. We like facts and data but there’s nothing like a good story to illustrate those data points. In some ways we never grow out of that childlike request, “Read me this book. Tell me a story.” Especially in this generation, so much importance is being placed on telling our stories and listening to people’s stories. Everyone has a voice and those voices all yearn to be heard. In recent times, we’ve come to think that we are each in control of authoring our own stories. And those stories don’t necessarily have to be connected to each other. They can even be contradictory! There’s “my truth and your truth”; “my story and your story.” But the point the Youth Gathering was making was that these 20,000 people from all over the United States and all around the world with unique experiences, and different backgrounds, and different challenges are actually all part of one story – God’s great story of all things. Everyone and everything are part of that story.

The Church tells and retells this story of all things. Every time we recite one of the creeds, we tell the story. The creeds are an abridged version of the story. They have a beginning: God created all things. They have a middle: God redeemed all things by sending his Son into the world. And they have an ending: Jesus will come again to judge all things. Some of our favorite hymns are the ones that tell the story – and many of them do cover the whole span from creation to the Last Day – “How Great Thou Art,” for example, begins with “O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds Thy hands have made” and ends, “When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation...” The structure of the church year tells the story from God’s promise of a Savior in Advent, to God sending his Son at Christmas, and then through Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Ascension, we walk through the story of Jesus year after year, and then we trace the life of the Church through Pentecost and the long season following until we come again to today – the happy ending of the story when Christ returns as victorious King to consummate his gracious reign over *all things*.

Peter Nafszger did some of the theological groundwork for the Youth Gathering, and as he analyzed this passage in the book of Colossians, he made two observations about God’s story: 1) First, that **this story includes us all**, and 2) second, that **this story includes all of each of us**. So I want to take just a few minutes to unpack those two claims.

First, **this story includes us all**. Maybe that sounds obvious and our reaction is, “well of course,” but often we don’t put our money where our mouths are! I would venture to think that most of us, most of the time operate with *too small* a picture of God’s story; *too small* an idea of Christ’s reign. We do this when we think of the Christian story of all things as just one among many – we might say, “We have our story, Muslims have their story, my next door neighbor has her own story. We each have our own story of the universe and the meaning of life.” But God’s story is not just one among many. It’s not just one possible explanation for existence. God’s story is big enough that it encompasses all the other stories – his is the story of all things.

Or we might exhibit small thinking about Christ’s reign. We might think we’re the ones who put Jesus on the throne – “I make Jesus the Lord of my life.” Or we think of his reign as limited – “He’s *my Lord*. He’s the Lord of those who believe in him.” But God’s Word puts no such limits on Jesus’ rule. St. Paul tells us, “*All things were created through him and for him...that in everything he might be preeminent.*” So Jesus is Lord of all, whether we accept it or not. We do not make Jesus king. He just is. We merely come to the realization of a reign, which has already begun.

God’s story and Christ’s reign are not small, and that’s a good thing because God’s story is the story of his love for a fallen world and Christ’s reign is a gracious reign. St. Paul writes, “*In him all things hold together.*” Christ makes sense of the whole story. Everything and everyone are included in it. Jesus came as Israel’s promised Messiah but he included Gentiles in his reign. He included Samaritans. He included Romans. He

| Colossians 1:13-20 • Christ the King 2022 • In All Things
 included women. He included little children. He included everybody – “*Make disciples of all nations.*” So if you want to talk about inclusivity, Jesus is the most inclusive figure in history. All things hold together in him. This also means that all the things in the world that confuse us, the things that trouble us and pain us, everything that’s gone wrong – even those things hold together in Christ. He has a plan for all things and it is all part of his story; it all happens under his reign.

Jesus also included you and me in his reign and that brings us to the second claim: **this story includes all of each of us.** There’s an old story told about the conversion of the Gauls. Now, it’s a fictitious story but it’s a good story nonetheless. Mark Allan Powell tells this story in a book about stewardship:

“A number of Christian missionaries ventured in Gallic territory and, over time, many of the Gauls became Christians. As the story goes, when a converted warrior was baptized in a river or stream, he would hold one arm high in the air as the missionary dunked him under the water. This seemed a peculiar custom and the missionaries soon learned the reason for it. When the next battle or skirmish broke out, the warlike Gaul could proclaim, ‘This arm is not baptized’, grab up his club or sword or ax, and ride off to destroy his enemy in a most un-Christian manner.”

We may think this is just a silly misconception but do we not operate the same way? How much of you is baptized? When are we under Christ’s reign? Is it only when we’re in church? Is it only before meals and at bedtime when we say our prayers? Perhaps there are times when we are engaged in certain activities, or while we are at work, or when we are interacting with certain people and we try to set our faith on the shelf. Try as we might, nothing can be kept out of the reign of Jesus Christ. Even if you were only sprinkled on your head, baptismal water has permeated and soaked every crevice of our bodies and lives. Every part of us belongs to Christ the King. Even our sins. Even our struggles. Even the difficult and confusing things in our lives are part of Christ and they are all written into the story of all things. “*In him,*” writes St. Paul, “*All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*” We may not see how something fits into God’s story but even those things will be redeemed. All things hold together in Christ. He has reconciled all things to himself by the cross.

Rejoice! Christ is King of all things. His story includes us all. So we can tell our neighbors this story and let them know that they, too, are part of this story. Christ’s blood has also reconciled *them* to God. And rejoice that this story includes all of you and all of me – every sin, every tragedy, every beautiful moment. All things hold together in Christ and in everything *he* is preeminent, he has the first place. *IN. ALL. THINGS. AMEN.*

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

