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Proper 29 • Colossians 1:13–20 • November 24, 2013

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An encouragement when preparing to preach on this text, the Epistle assigned for the Last Sunday of the Church Year: *Read aloud and meditate on all the assigned readings for the day, praying that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and move you with the truth of the Scriptures which you are reading and on which you are meditating. Take your time.*

Psalm 46: the ever-present help-in-trouble God who is our refuge and strength is, indeed, the God who will be exalted among the nations and in the earth. *In your meditation, be still and know that this is so, that God is God, your God as well as the God of all the earth.*

Malachi 3:13–18: the day of the Lord is coming (include Mal 4:1–2 as something of an exegesis of 3:17–18), and God, the Lord Almighty, who can throw open the flood-gates of heaven in blessing and also curse whole nations, indeed is the ruler of heaven

and earth. *In your meditation, consider not only the power and majesty of the Lord Almighty, but also the call to ethical and obedient behavior. This call is directed to you as well as all of humankind.*

Luke 23:27–43: Jesus’s crucifixion is recorded. At the same time that he is being crucified he also shows the nature of his promise, a promise he can make to the thief who asks to be remembered in Jesus’s kingdom, that, indeed, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43b). *In your meditation place yourself as the thief who asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom. Jesus, the suffering servant, also becomes Christ the King ... just not quite yet, for death, descent into hell, and resurrection are yet to come in the gospel story. But the promise is to you. Be still and know the promise of Jesus the Christ.*

At a personal level, I am very grateful for the bundling of these passages into the pericopes for this day. The Holy Spirit-guided readings and meditations helped prepare me for approaching, or perhaps rather being approached, by the Colossians passage.

This passage contains the magnificent poetry of 1:15–20. In the face of what appears to be the heresy of positioning Christ as just one of a number of heavenly beings in a hierarchical collection of divine beings and also the political-cultural threat of the place of and authority of Caesar as at least semi-divine, Paul sings (or at least uses) this wonderful hymn that focuses on the being of Jesus Christ. Christ is “firstborn over all creation,” creator of all things, head of the church, “firstborn from among the dead,” and the peacemaker through his blood shed on the cross. Christ is placed into Psalm 46 and Malachi 3! *In your meditation consider Christ’s redemption, majesty, sovereignty and rule, not only over the whole world and all of humankind, but also over you.*

All this does lead to a living ethic, a behavioral life to “live in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10a).

The pattern of attending to all the readings for the day could, then, form the outline for the day’s sermon. Invite your hearers into the readings in much the same way that I have invited you. The readings, in this pattern, build to the great christological hymn, a celebration of the power and majesty of Christ. The building toward this, however, uses these readings from various places and times in the scriptures to prepare us for the overarching reality: Christ the creator, Christ the ruler, Christ the victor, Christ the redeemer, Christ the king.

This overarching reality is not just a big-picture picture, although it is most certainly that. It is also a small-picture picture, for it embraces you and me individually and every person on whom the Holy Spirit has come and who confesses this Christ who “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness” and “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13a, 14).

This, then, also sets the stage for the kind of life we live as well!

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