**Colossians 1:13-20 November 24, 2019**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, Colossians 1:13-20 here re-reading these words. “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Can you think of a person in your life or your family that everything flows through? A person that if they were to be gone or out of commission with sickness or something else would mean a complete and total shutdown of what you were doing? Perhaps you’re thinking of your mother, your father, your grandmother or some other family member. Maybe you’re thinking about where you work and how if your boss or manager didn’t show up there would be no way to coordinate together the business of the day. For a lot of sports teams there are integral members that can’t be lost or else the team will lose, like the starting quarterback in football, the point guard in basketball, and even an amazing pitcher in baseball. This person sets the tone, is a leader and guide for everyone else and rules over the situation making sure that everything goes as it should. On Earth these people are wonderful helps, but nothing lasts forever. Families change and lose members, business’s start and close down. Sports teams are good and then team members are traded or retire. These leaders are here for a while and then gone, but Paul points us to a leader that created all things and sustains all things. The one who isn’t just a leader but the supreme leader with ultimate authority.

Here at the end of the Church Year we see Jesus as the one who rules and takes care of not just creation but everything in it. Here we see Jesus as the King. It’s what Jesus was called in His ministry, what He was hailed as at His birth by angels, shepherds, and later in the celebration of the Epiphany by the magi. While he lived a life that didn’t resemble a king he still remained one, a king that rules over His creation and that has subjects and those who look to him for guidance and direction. While Jesus has many names, and serves in a three fold office of prophet, priest, and King. Here at the end of the Church Year, as we focus on the end times and the return of the King of Kings Jesus Christ, we remember what it truly means that He is our King, and how our lives are shaped by this reality.

Paul writes “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.” Everything that is done is done by Him. Without him, everything falls apart. All other authority pales in comparison to him. It’s what makes him the superlative of rulers or Kingliest of the Kings. His authority and power can’t be matched by anything on the Earth because through Him the world was created by God our Heavenly Father. God spoke and it was done, and Jesus is himself the Word of God made flesh. The Word which now rules from the right hand of God after His ascension, until the time when He returns to bring wrath and judgment upon this world.

A wrath and judgment that the world had coming from the fall into sin. A wrath and judgment for sin that is shown in its open mockery of God, that was even going on at the time of Malachi. “And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and escape.” If we think that the mockery of the true King of this world; Jesus Christ is something new we are sorely mistaken. Pharaoh, King Nebuchadnezzar, King Herod and others saw themselves as gods and commanded that they be worshipped. God’s people were mocked in Egypt, Elisha, God’s prophet was mocked famously for his bald head, Noah, a devout man of God was mocked for building an ark and the list goes on and on. Here in our Gospel lesson Jesus was mocked by the people, the guards, the rulers all throughout His Passion, who said “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen one!” Jesus was even mocked by a condemned criminal who was hanging in agony next to him, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us”. Pontius Pilate in a final moment of mockery writes above the beaten and dying Jesus Christ “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”

The mockery seems to go unpunished in many of these stories, in Malachi the people wonder what’s even the point of following God in a world that is so corrupt. The Israelites are forced to serve this false god Pharaoh in Egypt and remain in captivity wondering if they will ever be free. But we also see the wrath of God against this mockery throughout Scripture. The evil host of the world is drowned in the flood. Pharaoh’s army is laid to waste. The youths who mock the representative of God are destroyed and devoured. There is wrath upon those who see the true God, the one with power and authority beyond their imagination, as weak, powerless and useless, who see themselves as higher and mightier. They are put in their place.

Which makes Jesus justified in His return and wrath, when the world is judged for what they have done wrong. Jesus is justified and innocent of the wrath upon this world and we only add to the corruption. We ourselves are not without sin but we only make things worse thinking that we are somehow better than others or not guilty of doing wrong. We are the guilty and sinful ones, and we’d expect the first words that Jesus speaks from the cross to be ones of wrath and judgment, of the destruction that is to come to all of us who have led him to the cross and death. But the King of Kings shows his perfection and ultimately his love in that the first words from the cross he speaks are “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” And how easy it is to think that Jesus is speaking only for the mockers, the sinners, the ones who don’t weep for him as the women do and as we do in our faithfulness. But this amazing moment smacks us in the face as the crucifixion of Jesus always will when we understand it. Here we see Christ crucified, and it is both because of us and for us. It is both the greatest moment of hope in our lives and the greatest sadness. For because of his death we are saved. By his wounds we are healed. As Paul puts it, “here the King Himself has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Here we see the King laying down his life for us, “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.” Peace by the blood of his cross, that’s what he’s doing on the cross for the entire world. Here the King lays down his life for the servants, a great paradox as the one with authority who has done nothing wrong, dies for the guilty. Dies for the ones who mock him and beat him. Dies to set them free from sin and eternal death.

Dies because of them and for them which means that the only reason he is on the cross is because of them. Which should cut us to the very heart. His suffering, his pain, his death, his mockery and humiliation, it’s all because of us. Not just the “deplorable” guards who physically whipped him, but also we, who stand in the face of mockery or add to it in our world. We who openly live contrary to God’s Word, we who choose to sin and not follow God’s Word. We who are guilty. That’s why he dies. It’s a cold hard truth, that here we see the greatest of rulers, who himself goes to the cross to fix our mistakes.

The women weep for Jesus because He is a King, and their king was dying. But Jesus instead says that they should weep for themselves, for the calamity of the world was coming, when the daughters of Jerusalem will wish that a mountain would fall on their heads to hide them from the wrath of the true King of Kings. Pilate meant for the notice above Jesus head to be a mockery of him, that here is the very King of the Jews, this beaten and crucified and bloody man from Nazareth. But Pilate didn’t realize that everything Jesus did pointed to his authority as a King. That while he hung upon that cross, he showed his authority over sin and death, and that He was willing to suffer it for his people.

That’s the love of Jesus for you. That’s the love that you have been connected to in your baptism. That’s the amazing moment, that Paul speaks of when he says that Jesus has taken you from a domain of darkness and transferred you to a kingdom of his own. This new birth and washing when you are now redeemed and made holy in God’s sight and welcomed into His holy family. We celebrate our Baptism because it connects us to Christ and it is through baptism that we are made heirs of his wonderful kingdom.

The thief on the cross who calls out to Jesus and recognizes his innocence, it’s interesting to note, makes reference to Jesus going into His kingdom. He understands that Jesus is a king. This guilty man, who hangs to die because of what he has done, recognizes the authority of Jesus, even while he is on the cross. Jesus, the one who was dying for the entire world, Jesus the one who created the world in which we live, Jesus the one by which the entire world is sustained. Jesus the one who doesn’t just die for everyone but specifically and personally knows you and dies for you. Without him, nothing works, nothing happens, nothing continues. So as we look back on this Church Year, we see Jesus and his work throughout our lives. And as we look forward to a day of thanksgiving, to a season of preparation, and finally to a joyous celebration of the baby in Bethlehem, we see how Jesus shapes our celebration and our lives in the Church, and how we, in joyful response, live our lives as a reflection of our King. Amen.