

“Superhero”

Rev. Eric. S. Corbin

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

November 20, 2016

[Psalm 46](#)

[Colossians 1:11-20](#)

Today is the day on the liturgical calendar officially known to our Roman Catholic friends as “Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.” We typically go with the much shorter “Christ the King” Sunday or “Reign of Christ” Sunday, but I’m intrigued by the longer title. *Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe!* That sounds almost like the title of a superhero. Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe! In a culture which loves its superheroes, perhaps that’s a good title for Jesus. According to Box Office Mojo, there have been eight superhero movies this year in the U.S., with a total gross, so far, of 1.8 billion dollars. We do seem to love our superheroes, but they are fictional. Jesus is the one true superhero, and yet the mentions in the media are exponentially more about the movie “Doctor Strange” than about the reality of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Why is that? And why is it that, during the nearly two year presidential campaign, mentions of insulting nicknames, demeaning comments toward women and minorities, and grouping supporters of the other candidate into “baskets” lead the news, while mentions of policy and governance were scarce? Why? Because that is what interests us. In our culture, what we ask for and are willing to pay for, we get. We are much more interested in “Batman versus Superman: Dawn of Justice” than in the God of justice, exemplified throughout the Bible, notably in passages such as Amos 5:24, in the Contemporary English Version: “let justice and fairness flow like a river that never runs dry.” Our priorities are often not what they should be.

This is the day on which we proclaim that Jesus is King of the Universe. We do not look to politicians as saviors. Like the nation in general, there are those in this congregation who are joyful at the election of Donald Trump and there are those who are appalled. Four and eight years ago, those same groups may have been reversed at the election of Barack Obama. However, though some have attempted to elevate political leaders to haloed status, none of them are our savior. Likewise, we do not look to superheroes or sports heroes as our saviors. As excited as many in this congregation were at the recent Cubs World Series victory, MVP Ben Zobrist is not our savior. We do not look to business leaders as our savior. Sheryl Sandberg and Warren Buffet are not our savior. We don’t even look to religious leaders as our savior. Pope Francis and Nadia Bolz-Weber are not our savior. We don’t need to look anywhere other than to Jesus on this Christ the King Sunday *or any day*. Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

The Companion to the Book of Common Worship, published in 2003, says, “As sovereign ruler, Christ calls us to a loyalty that transcends every earthly claim on the human heart. To Christ alone belongs the supreme allegiance in our lives.... In every generation, demagogues emerge to claim an allegiance that belongs only to God. But Christ alone has the right to claim our highest

loyalty.... From the beginning of time to its ending, Christ rules above all earthly powers!" (pg. 151)

Lord Jesus is King of the Universe, above all earthly powers, and our lives must reflect that reality. In this tremendously divided country, so many are operating out of nearly opposite worldviews, with our votes reflecting those worldviews. We are all shaped by our upbringing, our education, our surroundings, our culture, our friends, our neighbors. This has led many in opposing directions, with little sign of how the gap can be bridged. Good Christian people voted for different candidates, or for no candidate at all, and the election has now been decided. But if we affirm that Jesus is our King, then our ultimate allegiance is to no other ruler. We live under Christ's rule alone. As Presbyterian pastor Neta Pringle writes, when we become a Christian "[w]e are transferred, moved, deported, from one kingdom to another, from one way of living into another. Nothing is as we have known it." She continues: "Paul says that to follow Jesus is to orient one's life in a new way. Paul's insistence that in Christ all things hold together is another way to say that. Our faith in Christ gives us a worldview that is both large enough and consistent enough to address the myriad questions and problems that confront human life. To proclaim Christ as King is to acknowledge his lordship over all of life, all of creation." (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4)

In fact, the word "all" is mentioned eight times in our passage today. "May you be made strong with **all** the strength that comes from his glorious power." "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of **all** creation; for in him **all** things in heaven and on earth were created...**all** things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before **all** things, and in him **all** things hold together....In him **all** the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself **all** things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." There is no room for higher allegiances. All that we have and all that we are belong to Jesus.

If that is true, then we must speak out in solidarity with marginalized people, remembering from Matthew 25 that what we do for "the least of these" is done to Jesus himself. In the wake of the presidential election, there is documentation of a rash of harassment, violence, and vandalism towards minorities. The PC (USA) Stated Clerk, J. Herbert Nelson, wrote last week "I wish to affirm in this moment that many in our congregations and communities hold legitimate fear about their safety and the protection of their human rights. We hold close our Muslim, Hispanic, African American, immigrant, and LGBTQ neighbors, and those from other marginalized groups." (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/incivility-becomes-norm/>) Jesus said "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." There are those in our congregation, in our ESL program, in our community who are afraid. We stand with them in their fear. We remember that the word "sanctuary" also means "a place of refuge" and the people of Christ should provide refuge to those in need. The needs of those around us predate the election and will continue past any presidency, so it is up to those who call Christ King to provide for needs, including protection from harassment. Our Psalm

speaks of a time millennia ago, but it could just as easily be today: “The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter...[but] the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

God goes with us wherever we go. Our ultimate security is in our King. Therefore, we set aside all else to engage in the work of God. Being a Christian is not something we do in our leisure time. Being a Christian is not a suit we don for Sundays. Being a Christian is the core of who we are. It is our primary worldview, and thus we face the world undaunted. Some have said that being a Christian is boring. My response is “not if you’re doing it right.” The life of a Christian – a true subject of the reign of Christ – is never boring, as we face each day with countless opportunities to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We come to this place of worship and education to be better prepared for the daily adventure. We come here, unafraid to ask the tough questions. Who are we? Are we following God’s will? What image do we present to the world? These questions are pertinent for each of us as individuals, as well as for all of us together as this part of the body of Christ. The bracelets from a few years ago – WWJD, or What Would Jesus Do? – became trite, but the question itself should never be. If Jesus is our King, then we *should* consider these questions. Each of us should consider how we are following the reign of our King, in our words and deeds as we consider how we, the church, are following the reign of our King.

Our passage from Colossians also notes that God, through Jesus, is reconciling us all to himself. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul expands this a bit further to note that not only has God reconciled us to himself, but “has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” The hard work of reconciliation continues on with each of us, both inside and outside the church. We focus on areas of unity amidst our differences, including this congregation’s great emphasis on missions with those in need, near and far.

The first verses we read from Colossians indicate an understanding that the life of a subject of Christ the King will not be easy: “May you be prepared to endure everything with patience,” Paul writes. Yes, some of the time we pray to endure with patience, but that sentence continues, “While joyfully giving thanks to the Father.” Enduring with patience goes right along with joyfully giving thanks to our God. Boring? Never.

This Christ the King Sunday, we are reminded that Christ is to “have first place in everything.” Yes, everything. Today, we should reflect on our priorities. How do our lives, our spending, our time reflect our priorities? Do we show that Christ has first place in everything, or do we shoehorn Christ into our busy schedules? Does our giving to the work of Christ reflect first place, or are we contributing more to the billions of dollars in movie ticket sales than to Christ’s work? There’s a place for entertainment and sports and vacations, but we need to be clear that we put them in the proper context – with Christ having first place in everything. Yes, that’s a very tall order, but what else should we do for the one who holds all things together, in whom the fullness of God dwells, in whom we have reconciliation and redemption?

In the Christian calendar, today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Advent begins a new church year next week. New years are always appropriate times to reflect on the year past

and to make plans for the year ahead. In this week, we will also celebrate Thanksgiving Day. I pray that we seek to have our true superhero, Jesus Christ, in first place in everything. Amen.