

Enabled to Share

Christ the King Sunday

Luke 1:68-79 & Colossians 1:11-20

November 24, 2013

We celebrate Christ the King the last Sunday before the beginning of Advent. After a whole year of worship, the last word will be about the authority and preeminence of Christ. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

There is a story dating back to Nazi Germany, during World War II.



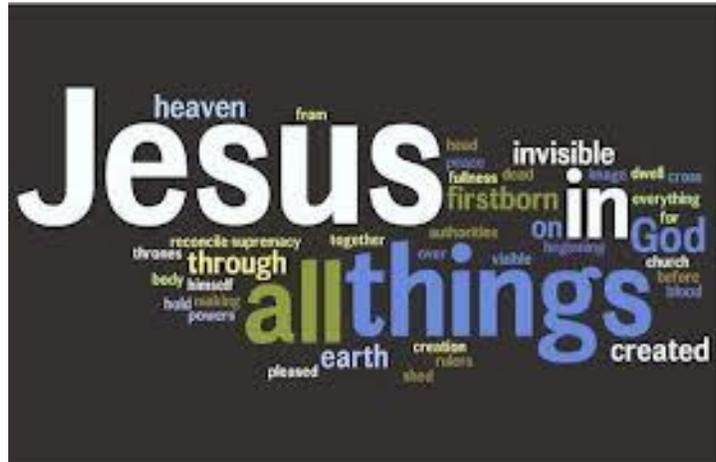
It involves a famous statue of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther, which still stands today in the city square. On a gray Sunday afternoon in 1943 a group of Nazi youth were patrolling the city of Wittenberg, strutting down the streets, brandishing their swastika arm bands. When they passed the famous cathedral where Martin Luther posted his 95 theses in 1517, they decided to deface the historic statue of the great reformer which had stood in the city square since 1821. They beat the large bronze statue to pieces, using their clubs. Then, in mocking triumph, they commandeered some paint and a brush and made a make-shift sign proclaiming, **“The reign of Christ is over.”** They hung the sign on a nearby fence.

Later, a Christian youth group came upon the square saw what had been done. They repaired the broken statue best they could (until it was professionally restored 67 years later.) Then, taking the same paintbrush and paint can the Hitler Youth had left at the scene, they added three letters to the Nazi message: "a-l-l." The slogan on the fence then read: **"The reign of Christ is over all."**



The reign of Christ is over all – that is exactly what the Apostle was saying to the Colossians. "All things have been created through him and for him," says Paul. "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

These words are poetic and beautiful, sounding almost like the words to a hymn. In fact, many scholars believe Paul was quoting a hymn for the rhythm of these words do not seem to fit the style of the apostle Paul, who earlier wrote to the Corinthians that he "did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:1).



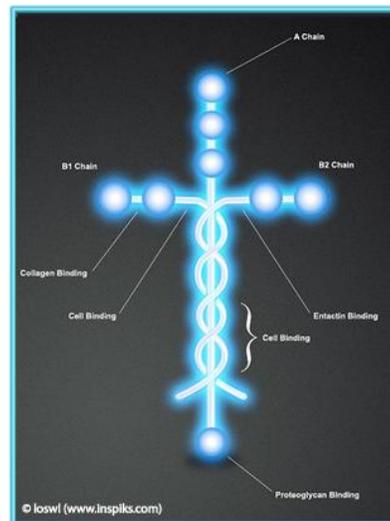
In most of his letters, Paul is a plain-speaking guy. So this may be an ancient hymn, perhaps one of the very oldest pieces of writing in the entire New Testament.

This ancient set of verses puts us in touch with one of the oldest sets of beliefs about Jesus. The letter to the Colossians is telling us that Christ "himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Not just some things...All things. To emphasize his point, Paul repeats the word "all" eight times in these ten verses of Scripture. In Christ, all things hold together.

This is true on a macro scale, so we might say, "Christ holds the world together." But it is also true on a micro scale. Sometimes the struggles of life get us so down that we feel we are about to fall apart. But Christ holds US together, too. Not only does the scripture affirm this, but apparently our very cells do. A Christian geneticist has pointed to the shape of **laminin**.

Laminin!

Colossians 1:17 - He is before all things,
and in Him all things *hold together*.



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According to National Center for Biotechnology Information “the laminins are a family of glycoproteins that provide an integral part of the structural scaffolding of basement membranes in almost every animal tissue. Each laminin is a heterotrimer assembled from alpha, beta, and gamma chain subunits, secreted and incorporated into cell-associated extracellular matrices. The laminins can self-assemble, bind to other matrix macromolecules, and have unique and shared cell interactions mediated by integrins, dystroglycan, and other receptors. Through these interactions, laminins critically contribute to cell differentiation, cell shape and movement, maintenance of tissue phenotypes, and promotion of tissue survival.”

Whew! That’s done...Thank God! For us non-geneticists, laminin is a protein in our bodies which holds our cells together, literally keeping us from falling apart. The amazing shape of laminin can be seen in a displayed diagram at the molecular level. This protein which holds us together looks like a cross!

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power...”

Christ the King enables us to share in the inheritance of the saints. We’re not far removed from our All Saints’ worship. Christ, who holds all things together, enables us to share in all that God has in store for those he loves.

"Enabled to Share"... You are enabled to share – which you might assume means, first, that because of God’s goodness you are somehow empowered to give away (SHARE) your stuff – yet what the Apostle Paul clearly means is that God has empowered us to receive (SHARE) his stuff!

First we have received from God, we have been enabled to share in his riches, only then are we invited to share ourselves, share of our own abundance, of what we have first been given -- always in the context of God's giving of Christ and our participation in his Kingdom. Paul lobbies for the Colossians to see Christ as pre-eminent...to make Christ the first priority of their lives...to imagine that Christ holds the world together.

We give, we serve, we help, we heal, we forgive, we share – because of what God has done in Christ.

Think about it...Christ holds the world together. Imagine a song... “He’s got the whole world -- in his hands, he’s got the whole wide world -- in his hands.” Imagine a map, which depicts the whole world within the arms of Christ. Such a map exists, or at least, it did. In the thirteenth century, someone sewed 30 goatskins together and then painted a map of the world on it. The center of the map was Jerusalem, and holding the world together is Jesus. It’s called the Ebstorf map.



At the top of the map is the head of Christ, on either side are his hands, and at the bottom are his feet. In Latin, you would call it a *mappa mundi Christiana*, a Christian map of the world. Christ literally covers this map and holds it all together. Jerusalem is his navel, with the new life of the resurrection depicted by a picture of Jesus leaving the empty tomb. Rome is represented in the shape of a lion, the Tower of Babel stands in Mesopotamia, and Adam and Eve are shown in the Garden of Eden. Around the map are descriptions of animals and the creation of the world. The map very well may have been made for Christian pilgrims, noting holy sites worth visiting.

The original map was 12 feet by 12 feet, painted on 30 goatskins sewn together. This *mappa mundi* was found in a convent in northern Germany in 1843. Sadly, the original was destroyed 100

years later during the World War II bombing of Hanover in 1943. All that survives is a set of black-and-white photographs and several color facsimiles.

We've lost the original mappa mundi, but not our belief in the Son of God who holds all things together. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created" (Colossians 1:15-16). Such a Christ can spread his arms across a mappa mundi Christiana and hold together the north and the south, the east and the west.

In the Ebstorf mappa mundi, the geographical center of the world is the empty tomb of Jerusalem, with a picture of Jesus being raised to new life. What does it mean to have the resurrection of Christ at the center of our map? With Jesus at the center, we can begin to see that he is much bigger than our own narrow view of the world. Christ touches everything in the mappa mundi. He holds the world together, just as he holds us together, and everyone around us.

Jesus is in new members and supporters on a cold morning raking leaves for appreciative



neighbors. Jesus is in the science lab, inspiring awe in students who are looking through microscopes. Jesus is in the courtroom, advancing justice through the work of attorneys and judges. Jesus is in the Deacons and faithful servants packing and distributing Thanksgiving baskets. Jesus is in the factory, creating products that can improve the quality of life for people everywhere. Jesus is in the humble worship spaces and grand sanctuaries of people across the globe, lifting hearts and healing souls.

God wants to put the world back together. Through Jesus, and through us. Christ the King, we His people. We have been enabled to share – first to receive – and then to give.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.