**July 17, 2022 Colossians 1:15-20**

 ***Not As It Appears***

**Scripture: *Colossians 1:15-20*** *NRSV*

*(15)He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; (16)for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. (17)He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18)He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. (19)For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20)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.*

**Notes:**

1. There was one person who saw ***something*** in Jesus.
	1. One criminal crucified with Jesus recognized a ***king***.
	2. The death of Jesus made us ***friends*** with God.
	3. Jesus is God’s ***Son***.
2. He is also Lord and King of ***everything*** in heaven and on earth.
	1. This king is all powerful, ***above*** ***all*** ***things***, the lord of all and master of the whole universe,
	2. Jesus doesn’t just dress up to be like us, he is one of us.
3. This ***servant-king*** is so important.
	1. We are ***sinners***.
	2. ***Sin***, if not addressed will in fact lead to an eternity in hell if we do not repent and ask forgiveness.
	3. We surrender salvation when we ***choose*** to leave sin go.
	4. Our sin ***condemns*** us.
4. Christ has died ***for us***.
	1. Jesus ***pardons*** and assures the man.
	2. We have a ***living*** King.
	3. We have a ***servant***-king.
5. Jesus cannot be separated from the cross where he died ***saving*** you and me.
	1. Worship this king of ***reconciliation***, ***submit*** to his will.
	2. Ask for ***forgiveness*** and ***strength*** to avoid temptation.
	3. To the thief on the cross, Jesus is our ***king***.

**Script:**

I remember it today just as it happened so many years ago. In the early to mid 1980’s I was very much into the Professional wrestling that you would see on television; so much so, that a group of us would get together every Saturday evening and watch 1-2 hours of televised hype and body slams. We even went as far as to go to a few of the wrestling matches. On one such occasion, we traveled to Altoona and we watched as the wrestlers entertained the crowds. Finally, it was time for the main event, and I did not care for the wrestler who was scheduled to come out and defend his title. The announcer began to introduce the next person to enter the ring, and I, assuming that he was introducing the wrestler I did not care for, began to boo and hiss and yell out remarks I am not too proud of. When the announcer finally stated the name of the man to come out, it was none other than Bruno Samartino, one of my favorite wrestlers of all time. I was embarrassed by my behavior, I was humbled by my ignorance, But I was fooled into thinking one thing, when things are not as they appear.

Have you ever thought a situation was something other than what it was? Did you ever fall into the trap of your own ignorance and do things that embarrassed you, did you say things that made you look foolish because you thought the situation at hand was something different?

We find a similar situation today in the verses leading up to our passage for today. Turn with me to Colossians 1:15-20 and stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage.

 *(15)He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; (16)for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. (17)He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18)He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. (19)For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20)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. Colossians 1:15-20 NRSV*

You can’t judge a book by its cover. In Luke 23, Jesus is delivered to Pilate, and later in that day Jesus is hung on a cross between two criminals. That is what we have been told. Jesus has been tossed around a bit, severely beaten. Stripped of everything he had including any sense of dignity he may have had.

He is weak from all the beatings; his clothes are stripped from him and soldiers gamble for his robe; he suffers the mockery of those standing around the cross. They call out, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37). They laughed at his weakness and in ability to save himself, they joked about his claim to be a king and now his unkingly naked body was nailed to an instrument of torture – what a joke and what a good laugh they had.

What made it worse was the sign that Pontius Pilate placed a sign above Jesus’ head which read, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”. (Luke 23:38). This made them taunt Jesus all the more; taunting him to come down from the cross and save himself. But it seemed he was powerless to do so.

Pilate had asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews”. Jesus answered, “So you say.” (Luke 23:3). He explained that his kingdom is not a worldly one and he is a king above all other kings. This certainly confused Pilate because all he could see before was a bleeding and bruised man in chains who looked nothing like any king he had ever seen. You see, Jesus answered Pilate in such a way saying that things are not what they seem – he may look like any other criminal that was brought before the governor but there was more to him that meets the eye.

On that hill outside Jerusalem, there was one person who saw something in Jesus that no one else saw. In spite of the gashes in his flesh from the whip, the nails, the wounds, the blood, the nakedness and the shame, one of the criminals crucified with Jesus recognized a king. He said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” (Luke 23:42). Jesus promised him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise”. (Luke 23:46).

A strange king indeed – suffering, weak, humiliated, despised, rejected and dying. But the death of this unlikely king made us friends with God through his death. God was going to stop at nothing to break down all barriers between him and all people. He was even prepared to let the King of kings and Lord of lords die in order to make everything right again between him and us.

This is where Paul’s letter to the Colossians picks up the theme of the kingship of Jesus. The apostle goes to great lengths to emphasize that Jesus is God’s Son; he is everything that God is. “For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers” (Colossians 1:16).

If he is the creator of all these then, he is also lord and king of everything in heaven and on earth. Paul goes on to say that Jesus is not only king of every part of creation, he is also head of the church (Colossians 1:18).

After he has described in length that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings he goes on to describe something very peculiar about this king. Things are not what they seem. This king is all powerful, above all things, the lord of all and master of the whole universe, with multitudes of angels at his beck and call, living in the perfection of heaven. Yet it was not above this king to get down and get dirty.

In some fairy tales you hear how a king dresses up as one of the peasants and lives and works with them in the local village because he is tired of the fuss of the royal court. But Jesus doesn’t just dress up to be like us, he is one of us. He takes on our human nature and lived among ordinary people especially sinners and outcasts, including lepers and the demon possessed. What happened to him could hardly be regarded as being kingly.

He died on a cross. Just grasp the magnitude of this. The King of kings and Lord of lords, God’s Son, died on a horrible human instrument of torture and death. Not only that, he died for all those who are enemies of God because of the evil things they did and thought (Col 1:21).

In his usual clear and precise way, Paul says, “He has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him” (1:22). That’s worth repeating to make it sink in. “He has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him.”

This image of the servant-king that Paul and Luke paint for us is so important as we face the prospect of coming face to face with the holy and righteous God. There’s no denying that we are sinners. There’s no getting around the fact that right up to the last day of our life we will continue to be tempted and many of us will fall to sin on occasion. This very sin, if not addressed, will in fact lead to an eternity in hell if we do not repent and ask forgiveness. I have been asked if we can lose our salvation, and the answer is very simply No!!! We cannot lose our salvation but we can surrender it if we take sin lightly, we can surrender our salvation when we choose to continue to indulge in the sinful acts that confront us on a regular basis. We surrender our salvation when we choose to leave our sin go without asking forgiveness, turning away from the temptation and sin that we live with.

The Bible makes it quite clear that our sin condemns us and we would have no chance of surviving the judgment of God on the last day. But Paul makes it clear that there is nothing to be afraid of. Christ has died for us. Jesus is master and king over sin, death and the power of Satan to condemn us. Jesus’ death has made us friends with God again and made us holy, pure and faultless. Our sin has been wiped away. Forgiven. Forgotten. We will be welcomed into heaven.

Isn’t that what happened to the man dying next to Jesus. In his moment of deepest agony, Jesus tells the criminal who sees in Jesus a king – a king whose power and authority far exceeds that of Pilate or even death – that his sin will no longer be held against him. “Today you will be with me in Paradise”. At a moment when all would seem to be hopeless and without a future, Jesus is truly a king. He pardons and assures the man that he will be with him in Paradise.

The word ‘paradise’ indicates a garden or a park, the kind a king would have. No earthly king would invite a robber or murderer to walk in his garden, but Jesus, the king, died for that man and made it possible for him to be *“holy, pure, and faultless”*and welcome. When we die or when the last day comes, we too will be welcomed into Paradise because Jesus has made us “*holy, pure, and faultless”;* providing that the sin in our life has been handed over to him and we have asked for forgiveness.

If the thought of the last day of our life or the last day of everything fills you with fear then be consoled by the fact that we have a *living* King. Yes, he did die on the cross, but while there, he spoke of the future. Without a doubt, there is a future after death and after the end of this world. Jesus promised the man next to him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise”.

The events of Good Friday have made it possible for us to feel safe and happy about the coming final day when Jesus will return. We have a servant-king who died for us and rose from the dead, who has done everything possible to ensure that we need not fear what will happen. At the end of everything, we are safe.

Kings and crosses don’t normally go together but in the case of Jesus they do. Jesus may have been raised to the highest place and given the name that is greater than any other name (Phil 2:9) but this mighty king cannot be separated from the cross on which he died saving you and me. As Paul so nicely summarized, “He has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him” (1:22).

Worship this king of reconciliation. If you have not already done so, submit to his will and his way today. If you have stumbled and fallen due to a temptation, ask for forgiveness and the strength to move forward avoiding this temptation. There is more hope in his little finger, than in the power and pomp of all the kings and presidents, emperors and prime ministers, parliaments and cabinets, that ever were, are, or will be. There is more power to change us and our world in his reconciling humility, than in all the battleships and bombers, armored tanks, helicopter gunships that kings, presidents and parliaments employ to change the world. Worship this new type of king, this Jesus, and trust him.

While things were not as they seemed to Pilate on that Friday almost 2000 years ago, To the thief on the cross, everything was crystal clear. Don’t just pay lip service, but trust him. Commit your ways to him and you shall know his peace, such as the world cannot give. This is our king – nailed to a cross to rescue us from the powers of darkness and sin. This is our king – risen and ruling, “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11).