

November 24, 2019 | Sanctuary worship service**TEXT: Colossians 1:11–20****TITLE: King and Kin***By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

As we anticipate gathering around tables today and later this week celebrating the mythological holiday of Thanksgiving with family and friends, it is important for us to communicate and stand on the truth and dispel untruths as it relates to the political myth of the founding of America.

It is appropriate and of utmost importance for the people of God to not live in darkness, but to live in the marvelous light, if we are ever going to stand together in unity and ensure that everyone is welcomed, respected, valued, and realize that everyone has a place and a voice in this country, and that this country belongs to everyone, regardless of any descriptor that may be used to describe or disparage.

Christ opened doors and welcomed people who were considered outcasts, marginalized, ethnically or physically unclean, the blind, other-abled, and mentally impaired. So, as we hasten towards Advent, preparing to receive the one who is both King and kin, majestic and lowly, fully God and fully human; the one who is the head of the body, the church and who holds all things together, it is imperative that we do the same.

In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul, builds a theologically systematic argument to refute those who are teaching that in order to be a child of God, you must have some secret knowledge—in other words be a member of the private, select club or clique of people who have special spiritual wisdom and understanding. The letter to the people residing in Colossae was written as a defense against those who espoused that unless you were a member of this selected group, you would not inherit the kingdom of God.

I declare to you today, that the lies and untruths that have been taught or miss-taught about this country about whose land on which we inhabit and the backs and sweat upon which this country was built are lies, deceptions, and ignorance. Like Paul, it's time for us to set the record straight, tell the truth and in the vernacular of my ancestors, "tell the truth and shame the devil." The truth is that God has opened the doors and welcomed in all people, of every nationality, race, ethnicity, economic level and class. God's work of making all things equitable and equal have already been accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus, we are kingdom kin. Now, I could just sit down and suggest you talk among yourselves, because believe it or not, that's today's message in a nut shell. But just as Paul had more to say, so do I.

Located in what is now southwestern Turkey, the city of Colossae was a cosmopolitan city, a place where diverse cultural and religious elements met and mingled. Colossae had a significant Jewish population. However, most of the Christians there were Gentile. The Christian church was being exposed to false teachings which Paul regarded as

hostile and subversive to the Christian faith. Henry Chadwich commented that (1:270–275) *“Paul’s defense of the faith goes hand in hand with an apologetic statement of faith to the intellectual world of his day. In this sense, the letter to the Colossians is one of the earliest Christian ‘apologies,’ or defense statements of the faith over against its rivals and competitors, that we possess.”* And I might add, the letter was dispatched to help those who received it better understand who Christ the Messiah, the majestic King is and was.

Sometimes, it’s difficult to discern who people really are. People will present themselves in one light, while in reality they are someone else altogether. People will present themselves as self-assured and arrogant, when in reality they are insecure and over-compensating. People will present themselves as having all the finer things in life, when in reality they are drowning their joyless life with things. People will present themselves as knowing God, when in reality, they only know God as divine, lofty, sitting in heaven, a judgmental and condemnatory king, but they don’t know the God incarnate in Jesus Christ who was fully human, loving, inclusive, and kind and who came to walk and live among us.

We are hopeful that the next president will be thoughtful, intelligent and civic-minded. We are prayerful that the rhetoric and lack of accountability and integrity that is pervasive in our governmental structure will cease. We are hopeful that someday soon those in power will deem it their responsibility to be mediators between those who “feel” disenfranchised and those who have always been disenfranchised; will reinforce the realization that we are only as strong as those who are economically, educationally, and socially weak among us; and that when we reach back and help someone else, we all end up on equal and equitable ground. We pray that one day we will realize that what has made this country great was not the colonists who landed on the shores, but the fact that we are not a homogenous country. We are a country of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and colors, genders and sexual identities, thoughts and ideals, gifts and talents. We acknowledge that to live in unity as the body of Christ does not mean we must live uniformly.

Paul stresses to the Christians in Colossae that what is important is that God rules and reigns and Christ is the one for whom and through whom all things in heaven and on earth were created. Paul teaches and assures that Christ is the fullness of God and all things are reconciled to God through Christ. Paul’s words focus solely on the work and life of Christ and are ultimately about life in Christ, the life of the church, the lives of persons who dwell in and are the citizens of the kingdom of God.

Citizens, not of Colossae, but transferred into the Christ’s jurisdiction and territory, not just in the future sense, but the present as well. This message was spoken to encourage the church to live, not as others do, but to live counter-culturally, as those who have already been transferred from darkness into the marvelous light. To live as those who have been redeemed and made free from the bondage of sin; as those already claimed as the children of God; to live as those who have received the inheritance of abundant and eternal life; to live faithfully, thankfully always.

Siblings in Christ, Paul's words are a call to action for us today. The reign of God is not something that will occur in the future but it is both already and not yet! Although we can only live in the now, as citizens in the territory of God, we have an imperative to live from a posture that challenges any aspect of the state and yes, especially anything, anyone or any institution that is counter to who we are in Christ Jesus - the reign of God in Jesus Christ is about justice, mercy, inclusion and opportunity for everyone!

On this Sunday, as we lift up the reign of Christ our king, we claim him as a ruler who despite being mocked and crucified announced the presence of his kingdom; as his body hung from the cross he proclaimed God's kingdom had come near. We claim Christ has surpassed all earthly rulers, elected or otherwise and sits at the right hand of God the Father, making intercessions on our behalf, his adopted siblings. We claim a ruler who judges the "kings" of this world who serve themselves, ignoring the needs of people, perpetuating oppression, marginalization and suppression.

As the people of God, may we continually praise and give thanks for the one who names us *all* as citizens of the kingdom of God, a kingdom where everyone is welcomed, safe, encouraged, and cherished. As the people of God, let us praise and give thanks for the one who is King, and loving, nurturing, shepherd and merciful kin, who calls us to live proactively in the now. As the people of God, may we make the conscious decision to walk in the light, tell the truth, that we might not perpetuate the lies, miss-truths and wrongs of the past. As the people of God let us praise the one who calls us to challenge oppression and disenfranchisement of people for any reason. Let us praise the one who implores us to call out anyone who causes us to look at others with suspicion, or to see or name people as anything other than beloved siblings redeemed by Christ.

Let us praise the one who implores us to stand and repair the breach for those who have worked until the day is done and can't stand any longer; to hold up the arms of those of who have grown tired and weary in the fight for ethnic, racial, gender, economic and political justice, equality and righteousness. Let us praise the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, the one who became fully human to reconcile us back to God; and who dwells within us. We will praise and give thanks for Christ. He is Lord and redeemer, savior and brother. He is our King and kin! Thanks be to God. Amen.