

Choose this Day
Confirmation Sunday
November 23, 2008
Joshua 24:14-15, Eph. 1:15-23, Col. 2:6-10

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the day in the church calendar when we celebrate Jesus as King. Not just that Jesus *will be* King at the end of time; the Bible says that He is King now. In our Preparation Scripture, we heard: Eph. 1:20-21. This is a great day to also be celebrating Confirmation. Today, six of our young people will stand before you and claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior, confirming the vows that were taken on their behalf on the day of their baptisms, many years ago.

A few weeks ago, we shared the joy of baptizing children of three of our families. We heard the parents of little Olivia Fannin, Jacob Rogalsky, and Jackson Rogers, claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior as they presented their children for baptism and inclusion in the covenant community we call 'church.' Being willing to stand publicly and profess faith in Jesus is the fundamental requirement for baptism. Somebody – either the person being baptized or the ones presenting the child for baptism – somebody must make that public statement that says that Jesus is not only Lord and Savior for others, He is the One who died to forgive *my* sins. He is the One who is the leader of *my* life. Jesus is not only a *general* and *generic* Lord and leader, forgiver and Savior, it's personal. Jesus is *my* Lord, *my* Savior. Jesus died for *me*.

That is what these six will confirm before God and the church today: the Christian faith is not only the faith of their parents, it's not only the faith taught by their church, it is what *they* believe, too. Since last summer, Jessica Kushall, Allan Matyger, and I have been meeting regularly with these students, and they've had lots to study and learn over these months. They've memorized Scripture. They've read through and reflected on the gospel of Mark. They've learned the books of the Bible, they've learned about the Reformation and how the Presbyterian church works. They've worked hard and learned a lot. And I hope they've had some fun along the way. I know that it's been fun for Jess, Allan, and me to get to know them and share our faith with them. They've written what they believe: you can read their statements on the posters. And now it's time for them to stand publicly and confirm those baptismal vows.

You know, whether or not their parents really knew what they were doing when their babies were baptized, today we get to witness along with them an amazing thing: the faithfulness of God. Even though we are so often *not* faithful to the promises we make, God is always faithful. When we give our children to God and His church in baptism – even though we may not, probably *do not* – fully understand what we are doing in that moment, God is there. And God knows what *He* is doing in that moment. It's not about how much water we use. It's not the integrity of the promises made by the parents or the words spoken by the minister. Here's the most amazing thing of all: *God* is faithful to the promises *He* makes in baptism. Even though we turn away from Him and all He promises us, God never does. Even though we fail to keep the promises we make, God never does. If you have ever presented a child for baptism and then watched with a broken heart as they seemed to walk away from those promises, let this give you hope today. They may have abandoned God, but *hear me today*: God has not abandoned them.

So here they are, Confirmation Class 2008. In spite of everything their parents have done that was wrong – or right; in spite of everything they have experienced in the church that was unloving or unkind – still they desire to stand with us. To say that Jesus is Lord and Savior – not only ours, or humanity’s or the world’s – but their own personal Lord and Savior. Today, on Christ the King Sunday and Confirmation Sunday, I want to explore with you what it means to say “Jesus is Lord.”

Those for whom the Bible was originally written would have understood the imagery of God as King better than we do, because most of us have never lived under a King. We elect our leaders. Kings are not elected. We get to choose our leaders, but those who live under a monarchy do not. We have just elected a new president: he’s known as the Leader of the Free World. Today, these six stand and choose for themselves a leader, the Leader of the Free Life, the life they will live from here on out as followers of Jesus. Today they say, “Jesus Christ is *my* Lord and Savior.” So what does that mean? Paul has some helpful words for us in Col. 2:6: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord...”

Received = to take to one’s self, to join to one’s self. It also means to receive something transmitted; the handing down of teaching from one generation to another. The Greek word for Lord is *kurios*: 1) he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has the power of deciding: master; 2) the owner of a thing; 3) one who has control of the person. So when we say “Jesus Christ is my Lord,” we are saying that He owns us. To say we have “received Jesus as Lord” means we have joined ourselves to Him. So if you say Jesus is your Lord, you acknowledge that you belong to Him and that *He* gets to decide what your life will look like. We tend to think and are taught that *we* are the masters of our own destiny. Remember that scene from the movie *Titanic* when Leonardo diCaprio stands on the bow of the ship and says, “I’m the king of the world!”? That’s how we mostly live our lives. Not Christ as King. Me as King. We are big into self-determination. There is no authority bigger than the insatiable self, no goal or purpose in life more important than the pursuit of our personal happiness.

We think we belong to ourselves. But the Bible says something else. 1 Cor. 6-19-20. The price that was paid for you was high. It was Jesus’ life, Jesus’ blood. Jesus’ life was given up in exchange for your life. It was *for you* that Jesus hung and suffered and died on that cross. That’s what it means to say, “Jesus is Savior.” Jesus saves us from death, saves us from having to pay the penalty for our sins. Instead, we receive forgiveness and a clean slate. Truth be told, we embrace the ‘Savior’ part more than the ‘Lord’ part. But Jesus is and must be both.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that He has the right and authority and power to rule and therefore we must submit to Him. We don’t like submission of our will very much. We want what we want. But Jesus is Lord and King so that means He rules and therefore He gets to determine what life should look like. He gets to determine the shape and character of life – all life, but most particularly, *our* life. This teaching about Jesus as Lord is not something we come to on our own, it is passed down to us, we receive it from those who have believed before us. Those who know and trust Jesus as Lord teach us what that means; show us what that looks like. That’s our job, church. That’s what we and others before us in this and other congregations have done. That’s why these students stand before you today: because they have received teaching about what it means that Jesus is Lord from us and others in the church. And believe me, most of what they know about Jesus as Lord has been *caught* from watching how you live, more than it has been *taught* by hearing the words you say.

Col. 2:6: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live in Him...*” See, “receiving Christ” isn’t just about what you believe in your head about Jesus. It’s also about belonging to Him and behaving *like* Him. “Live in Him” is literally “walk in Him.” Those who have received Jesus as Lord, walk in His footsteps; the NLT says: “you must continue to follow Him.” The MSG: “now live Him.” Walking through snow, stepping in someone else’s bootprints.

Paul gives four characteristics of what it means to live in Jesus: V. 7: 1) “rooted and built up in Him...” Having been rooted: perfect tense, suggesting a completed action with continuing influence. You have been rooted, planted in Jesus; also referred to sinking foundations. To live in Jesus is to know your roots. To know where your foundations have been laid. You have been rooted – your foundation of faith has been laid - over the course of your life, by your parents and the church. So now and for the rest of your life, you are 2) being built up in Him. This is present tense, suggesting continuing action. So to live in Jesus is to be continually under construction. When something is rooted, when a foundation is laid, it implies that something will grow, something will be built. That something is *you* – your life, your faith: 3) being strengthened in the faith as you were taught. We need to continue to teach them, church, so their faith will continue to be strengthened. And you, Confirmation Class, you need to continue to be learners. Confirmation is not the end of learning what it means to belong to Jesus, it’s just the beginning, really. Confirmation does not mark graduation from church. Receiving Jesus as Lord is not the end but the beginning. “Live that life,” Paul says. Live Him, live Jesus. So they have to see us live it, church – we have to walk it – to continue to teach them by our lives.

4) ...and overflowing with thankfulness. Again, present tense, implying continuing action. Our lives as followers of Master Jesus – subjects of King Jesus – our lives should be characterized by an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude for all that God has done in calling us to belong to Him, leading and guiding us by His church, forgiving our sins and drawing us to Himself through Jesus and what He did on the cross. “Thank you, God,” should be our constant prayer. “Thank you, God, that *you* are in control of my life, not me. I’d make a mess of it.” (*I have* made a mess of it.) Caedmon’s Call song: “How you make good of this mess I’ve made is a profound mystery.” “Thank you, God, that you never give up on me.” “Thank you, God, that I’m never alone. You give me the Holy Spirit and you show me Jesus through the church.” To live in Jesus is to overflow with thankfulness.

Col. 2:6-7. Well, that sounds very nice, but it’s not as easy as it sounds. Jesus isn’t the only choice to make. Thankfulness isn’t the only attitude we may choose to have. There are other influences in the world, other ideas about how to live and whom to follow. If you do not live in Jesus – if you do not recognize that you are rooted in Him, if you are not continually being built up in Him, strengthened in your faith and overflowing with thankfulness – you will be open to other influences. So Paul warns them: Col. 2:8.

We are all so very susceptible to being captured by the hollow and deceptive philosophy of our world. The philosophy that says ‘it’s all about me’ and ‘I’m worth it.’ The way of thinking that says the goal and purpose of life is to be beautiful and successful and popular and rich. The worldview that says I am the master of my own universe and I am free to choose whatever makes me happy. See, it’s ironic. We think that the power we have to be independent, we think our freedom to do whatever makes us feel good, whatever makes us happy, whatever seems right to us, we think that we are free to make those choices. But in reality, this idea that we are the ultimate authority in our lives has the potential to *take*

us captive. So in fact, we are *not* free, we are slaves to the insatiable self, and we don't even know it. We think that we are what our DNA makes us. Whether it's an addiction or a sexual orientation or a body type, we think, "I can't help it; this is just the way I am." This is a lie. Here is the Truth: Jesus is Lord. We can find deliverance from everything in Christ.

Here's what it really means that Christ is King: He has conquered any and all powers that seek to rule over us: *any* addiction, *any* behavior, *any* tendency or attitude or seemingly genetic orientation. *Jesus* is Lord. *Jesus* is King. Every other power must take a back seat to Him.

We are also taken captive by the idea that the goal of life is to be successful as the world defines success, rather than to become godly as God requires. Did you hear me? God desires that you become *holy* and *good*. God is not concerned with success as the world defines it. He does not command you to be successful; He desires that you be faithful. But in Jesus, we have been set free from principles of the world that threaten to enslave us: ideals of success or beauty or happiness. So see to it, dear ones, that no one and nothing takes you captive. You have received Jesus as Lord, so live in Him.

Col. 2:9-10. When you live with Jesus as your Lord, the leader of your life, the King of your world, this is what you get: fullness. Completeness. Abundance. All the good things. The good life. That's what you choose when you choose Jesus. You choose to be full rather than empty: full of all the good things God desires to give you. If you've ever tried it you know that living the world's way ultimately does not fill you up, but leaves you empty. What are you choosing to fill yourself with? Christ or something else? Today is the day to choose for yourselves.

After Joshua had led the people of Israel to the Promised Land, as he came to the end of his life, he gave a farewell speech to all the people. And he challenged them to renew their commitment to the LORD, the One who had led them from slavery to a free life in a land flowing with milk and honey. "If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..." There comes a point in all our lives when we must choose. Usually many points. Today is one of those points for these six students. Today they choose for themselves whom they will serve. Today they say, "Jesus Christ is *my* Lord and Savior."

Of course, they only make this choice because God has already chosen. God chose them before the creation of the world to belong to Him. That is why they stand here before you today. Not so much because of what *they* have decided. But because *God* decided. And God has drawn them to Himself through – of all things – the church. And you can also make this choice today. You can make this same choice today, whether for the first time or as a renewal of your commitment to Jesus. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."

But as for these six, they choose Jesus. Lord and King, Savior and forgiver and forever friend. We are so very proud of you.