

It's Not Jesus' Last Name (the COSMIC Christ) – 4th in series of Six on POWER IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
Ephesians 1:3-14

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 7th Sunday after Pentecost (July 12) 2015

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us^[a] for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known^[a] to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee^[a] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,^[a] to the praise of his glory.

It's not Jesus' last name. You see we have gotten so used to saying Jesus Christ, together, that we treat "Christ" as though it is Jesus' last name.

I had a member of Saint Marks Church tell me recently that when he first came here, he was put off some by **my reference to Jesus as "my Best Friend,"** because it seemed to make THE LORD too small, too personal, too close. He had been brought up with the idea of Jesus "high and lifted up."

He told me that he has changed, and his spiritual life is enriched now when he realizes that Jesus is so very, very close. And so it does. Try it.

Jesus is so very, very close. He really is our best friend who walks with us and talks with us and tells use all kinds of good things.

But, as one theologian put it:

Jesus has only been around for a little over 2,000 years. Christ has been around forever. Christ is not Jesus' last name. Christ is so very, very big – even COSMICALLY big. You don't have to believe me; all you have to do is read the first chapter of Ephesians [our scripture for today] or the first chapter of Colossians or the beginning of the Gospel of John. Christ is the office. Christ has been around a lot longer than Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem to fulfill the role of the office of Christ.

And if you look at those "supplemental scriptures" that I have printed in the bulletin, you get a notion of what that theologian and Bible scholar was talking about.

Colossians 1:15-20a, indeed, reads very much like today's epistle reading from Ephesians. I am particularly enamored with the **Gospel of John text**, which intentionally sounds like the first chapter of Genesis: **"In the**

beginning... “John” talks about this thing that he calls both “word” and “light” that have been with us since the very beginning. He’s talking about “Christ.”

What fascinates me about that is how the “LIGHT” is described in the first chapter of Genesis. Some people miss it, so I’ve printed it out, also, as a supplemental scripture. You see how God, in verse 4, says, **“Let there be light,’ and there was light.”** When was this? Verse 5 tells us: **“the first day.”**

Then I skip forward to verse 14, where we read about the creation of the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven. When was this? Verse 19 tells us: **“the fourth day.”**

The LIGHT that John talks about – the COSMIC CHRIST – has been with us from the very beginning. To make sure that we understand that, the writer of Genesis makes clear that that LIGHT was from the beginning (Day ONE) and the things that give us earthly/physical light didn’t come until Day FOUR.

Or, in the words of today’s scripture (verse 4) **“before the foundation of the world”**

Christ is not Jesus’ last name ... any more than “Reverend” is my first name, nor “Bishop” is Sandra Steiner Ball’s first name, nor “Mayor” is Danny Jones’ first name, nor “President” is Barack Obama’s first name.

“Reverend” “Bishop” “Mayor” and “President” are all names of THE OFFICE.

Not all people do ministry the way I do – wearing the stole of the office of ELDER during worship or wearing the CLERICAL COLLAR almost all the time outside of the sanctuary as well. These are signs of MY OFFICE.

I personally am not REVEREND, but that is the title associated with my office.

The clerical collar outside the sanctuary is a sign of my office.

Because of that OFFICE, and not because of any personal knowledge of me, so many strangers come up to me in the hospital, Kroger’s, and elsewhere, and give me things to pray about. It’s not about me, but it’s about THE OFFICE I REPRESENT. The Church, through the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry has said that I am SAFE enough to represent that high office.

CHRIST is not Jesus’ last name; it is HIS OFFICE. And that OFFICE is VERY, VERY BIG. It truly is COSMIC – since the beginning AND forever to the end of time.

The COSMIC CHRIST is about REDEMPTION.

And the REDEMPTION that the COSMIC CHRIST is about is much, much bigger than what some in the Church too often preach and teach.

I don't mean to step on toes here, but so much of the time, I hear the word REDEMPTION used ONLY in the context of personal salvation ... where I will spend eternity after I cross over the threshold of the doorway we call DEATH.

The REDEMPTION that the COSMIC CHRIST is about – we are told in TODAY'S SRCIPTURE LESSON – is about the REDEMPTION **OF ALL THINGS**.

And when I hear preachers talking about Jesus CHRIST **ONLY** in terms of “Are you saved?” or “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?” it seems to me to be almost blasphemy for how self-centered and small they are making the office and purpose of CHRIST.

The REDEMPTION Christ will accomplish – as the scripture tells us “*in the fullness of time*” is about “**ALL THINGS**.”

What is the purpose of God in Christ? Would you read together with me verse 10 as the answer to that question. (I'll ask the question again, and then we'll respond with verse 10.)

What is the purpose of God in Christ?

a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth

Redemption is soooooo BIG! Jesus, Himself said it in God's Gospel:

³² **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw ALL things to myself.”** (John 12:32)

And God **WILL** do it through Christ ... in the fullness of time.

Redemption is soooooo BIG!

And, at the same time, it also does have a personal aspect. No, not just “my personal salvation.” But MY role, YOUR role, in the REDEMPTION of all creation.

Redemption – the PURPOSE of God in the COSMIC CHRIST -- is so big – it is about all creation (read Romans 8 -- *all creation is waiting with eager longing*) but you and I have a role in it.

I am included; YOU are included. But we do **NOT** have to **MAKE IT HAPPEN**. **In fact, we can't make it happen.**

We have to **LET IT HAPPEN** through us.

For four weeks in worship, we have used the same “Affirmation of Faith” which comes from the BAPTISM VOWS:

“Do you accept the freedom and power that God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in what ever forms they present themselves?”

“**evil, injustice, and oppression**” – all those things that are in opposition to the REDEMPTION of creation.

Our job is NOT to beat them down with our own strength, with our own will power, with our own tools. NO! Our job is to LET God do it THROUGH us: to **accept the freedom and power that God gives you**

So often, I hear the teaching of the Church to be “Do it, Do it, Do it. Get stronger, make it happen.”

Or, too often, I hear the voice of the “functional atheists” in church that say “We don't have the ability to do it.” Darn right, we don't. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it.

The COSMIC CHRIST says: **accept the freedom and power that God gives you**

In the fullness of time, the COSMIC CHRIST is going to REDEEM ALL CREATION. It's going to happen.

- All things will be set right.
- No more evil,
- No more injustice,
- No more oppression.

It is so wonderful to know that this IS the case.

Last Saturday evening, I believe it was, the ROOT network (Home of Pittsburgh Pirates Baseball) was showing the baseball game. I was a little disoriented when I came into the bedroom and saw the game on television. I thought that the game had been played earlier that day.

As it turns out, I was correct; this was a replay of the game. Actually I had fun with this, by turning to my ESPN app on my iPhone, and seeing what runs had been scored by whom in what inning.

The Pirates were behind, but I told Jane, “Don’t worry. They will pull it out.” She mistook this for my usual Pirates/Steelers optimism, regardless of how far behind my team is. But then I started telling her, at the beginning of the Pirates “at bat” who was going to get a hit and who was going to score a run. I was carrying off the “Voice of Prophecy” pretty well ... until the replay skipped over two innings in which nothing much happened. THEN Jane began to realize that “something was rotten in the state of Denmark.”

BUT, for me it was so much fun to watch the drama unfold, while I knew that the outcome was certain.

And **THAT** is what today’s scripture is all about.

No, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was not about Pirates baseball! (How about that game last night, Cardinals fans? Walk off homer in bottom of the 14th inning! At half past midnight.)

No, today’s scripture is about the fact that IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, God through Christ IS going to REDEEM all creation. We know what is the final outcome.

We have a choice: Do we want to play on the winning team? Do we want to **accept the freedom and power that God gives you?**

Redemption is such a powerful, powerful promise. ALL things in creation WILL be SET RIGHT.

Is there something that is giving you grief or pain in your life right now? God will redeem it. Romans 8:28 tells us: ***All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose.***

Will you **accept the freedom and power that God gives you** to make these **things work together for good?**

We each have a choice. But the end is assured.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.