

Feast of Christ the King

The Cosmic Christ

We gather together today at the end of the liturgical year, on the Feast of Christ the King. We move from creation to the end times in our readings and are asked to consider how Christ holds all things together. Such a task can make us feel dizzy – and the words of apocalyptic literature, of which the Book of Revelation is an example, can challenge us with its imagery. Yet, what apocalyptic literature seeks to do is to view the whole of creation at its point of final redemption – the place at which the true glory of God is revealed and the various and diverse deceptions and lies which corrupt and betray the experience of all living things are revealed for what they truly are: falsehoods. That is a hopeful vision, for it is one in which and through which, we are promised that truth and reality are co-existent.

To connect the account of creation in Genesis with the final book of the Bible is to move through thousands of years and then through millennia. It is to both see the naïve account of creation for what it is, whilst recognising that it contains the truth of the Creator's intention: to make, pronounce good and bless. Whatever our experiences of being alive – good, awful, wonderful, terrible, beautiful, challenging, awe inspiring, painful, mundane, we place them within the framework of not only creation as blessing, but creator as redeemer. This is what connects Genesis with Revelation and the Feast of Christ the King – God creates and in Christ God redeems.

The Incarnation is a surprising, miraculous, mysterious wonder in which creation and new creation, birth and salvation are intimately intertwined.

St Paul writes that:

Jesus 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, things visible and invisible'.

Jesus is the Word of the Father.

Jesus is both human being, and second person of the Trinity, co-eternal with God.

In Christ creation is held together, he is activator, still point and finisher.

St Paul continues:

'He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together'.

And 'through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross'.

The uncreated Word participates in both *creation and death* and in so doing combines and unites the temporal with the eternal.

For an age discovering the importance of the interconnectedness of all things, such an interpretation of what Christ is and how he exists is remarkably prescient. Moreover, it stretches our human centred salvation history in ways that it is desperate to be stretched. To limit the idea of salvation to humans is to limit God's saving action in Christ. Moreover, human salvation makes no sense apart from the restoration of the whole of creation, if it really is true that Christ is in all and that through him all things hold together.

Think about it this way. In our Genesis reading we see the creation of the universe, and we see that humans are given a special place in the creation narrative. Yet, at no point is their material existence distinct

from the existence of all else that has been made- we are related in an interconnected, mutually dependent way with the rest of creation. To transpose human salvation on to an elsewhere that is disconnected from the rest of creation is to misunderstand the nature of the universe. Humans may have particular responsibility due to their agency, power and moral sense but they are not substantially different from the air they breathe, or the water they drink.

We have realised this afresh in the past fifty years, with increasing ferocity as we've noticed that our seas are filthy repositories of human waste, that our local rivers are not fit to swim or baptise in, that the corrupted air we breathe is killing our children and that plastic is omnipresent, haunting us with its longevity and enticing us with its practicality.

So, when we have talked over and over again in Protestant history about personal salvation, we have distorted the Gospel by suggesting that individuals can be saved apart from the whole of creation. I believe in God, otherwise. I believe in God not to secure a place in heaven, but so that the birds in my garden and the soil I walk upon might be released to praise God. I believe because I desire the restoration of all things.

'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Romans 8:19-21).

The children of God – those who believe and love – do so on behalf of the whole of creation, not just for themselves. As our saviour has taught us in his self-giving act of love – we believe not for our own benefit but so that all might live.

Richard Bauckham (former Cambridge New Testament scholar) writes, that:

‘It’ i.e. The incarnation...

‘Proves transformative for the whole creation because the loving self-identification of the crucified Christ with the whole creation in the tragedy of its disharmony and decay as well as the glory of its profusion and vitality draws the whole creation with him into the eschatological novelty of his resurrection. He himself is the goal of creation in that it will be in relation to him that the whole creation comes to its fulfilment.’

The cosmic Christ is indeed the Christ who is in all and for all, remarkably consistent with contemporary ideas of ecology and a focus on wholistic health and well being. We live, not alone and for ourselves, but with each other in relation to all that has been made. The sooner we grasp this truth the sooner we may reform our practices and be part of the good news for the whole of creation.

As we hold together God the Creator with the idea of the Cosmic Christ, we are challenged to enable all living things, all that has been made, to be set free to glorify God. In our abuse, commodification, plunder and degradation of creation, we must repent – for God made it, God loves it and God sustains it.

Let’s end with a passage from Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*.

Love all God’s creation

The whole and every grain of sand in it.

Love every leaf,

Every ray of Gods light.

Love the animals

Love the plants

Love everything.

If you love everything

You will perceive

The divine mystery in things.

Once you perceive it

You will begin to comprehend it better every day.

And you will come at last to love the whole world

With an all-embracing love.

Amen

Rev'd Imogen
Selwyn College, Evensong
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