

trip into downtown Ottawa to tour the stunning Catholic Basilica called Notre Dame. It was stunning architecture. It was intricate in its detail. But it also made a certain statement about who Jesus is.

The soaring architecture reminded us of the transcendence of God's power. The main altar reminded us that Jesus sits on his throne in glory. The many gorgeous carved icons brought our minds into the heavenly places surrounded by the saints who are the "mighty cloud of witnesses" watching God's plans unfold.

It is so important for us to have a personal relationship with Christ. He calls us his friends, brothers and his bride. But we must never lose sight of the cosmic realities at play. We must never forget that Christ is above all our king, who reigns in power over everything that is.

But then we must ask why? Why is this theme of Christ the king so essential to our Christology? Why must we hold on to these familial and friendly images of our relationship with Jesus on the one hand, while at the same time holding on to these magisterial ones?

The answer is security. When Jesus is friend, brother and spouse, we have someone who can relate and who can meet us where we are. And when Jesus is king we have someone who has dominion over all that is wrong in the world.

To whom can you turn when everything is upside down? To whom must we pray when the world's powers and principalities are up to no good? To whom do we look when things go

sideways? The answer? The one who is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

Listen to this quote by author Adam Ramsey:

God is victorious. To say this is to confess the logical outcome of all the attributes we know about God. He cannot lose; he is undefeated and undefeatable. The victorious God cannot and will not fail in a single one of his purposes. Should the entire created universe rally against him with all its collective fury, it would amount to no more than an army of butterflies waging war against the sun. It's a non-contest. The grand story of human history will climax exactly as God intends it to, and he will be glorified and worshipped and delighted in by his people forever and ever without end. And in the meantime, we have what the apostle Peter calls, "A living hope" in the character of our God and the certainty of his promises.

And it is with this hope that we can face the uncertain and difficult path ahead of each one of us. We do not know the way, but we do know the King.

There is coming a day where our gospel will no longer be news to be announced but a song we sing. In light of who God is and what God has done, we can rest in the assurance of where he is leading us.

And if God cannot lose, then neither, beloved brothers and sisters, can you.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

## ***"Made for it: King"***

*November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23  
By Rev. Mike Putnam*

**W**ell, after three Sundays of thinking about these unique relational metaphors that scripture gives us, my hope is that you are feeling your heart soften toward who Jesus is. I hope that you are beginning to think of Jesus a little differently.

And in turn, I hope that the possibilities of your relationship with Him as your friend, brother, and groom might be opening up possibilities for renewal and even transformation in your other human relationships too.

But this morning, on this final Sunday in this series, and final Sunday in the church years, we're taking this in a slightly different direction. Because, as so often is the case in the Christian faith, we need to hold to really distinct ideas together at the same time. You might even say that what I'm about to say is irrational.

But first a caution. Jesus is your friend; Jesus is your brother, and Jesus is your bridegroom. But Jesus is not your boyfriend.

That's one of the critiques that is levelled against modern evangelical worship music industry. So often today, artists, singing in hushed and lusty tones, sing as if to her boyfriend, not to her Lord and Saviour. It can get kinda weird. We don't want to make that mistake.

And so this morning we have kind of a corrective to that possibility. Yes, Jesus is deeply relational. So much so that he invites us to call him friend, brother

and spouse. But at the same time, we must hold onto the reality of who Jesus ultimately is.

I'm reminded of the movie Talladega Nights, where Will Ferrell plays Ricky Bobby, a rather immature but successful NASCAR driver. Ricky grew up in the religious south and was influenced enough to have cobbled together a funny and infantile version of faith.

So, when the family sits down to a family dinner of Dominos Pizza, Taco Bell and other fine fast-food delights before a big race, Ricky Bobby says grace (as one does). "Dear tiny infant Jesus..." Bobby's wife interrupts, "Hey you know what, Honey, Jesus did grow up. You don't always have to pray to baby Jesus, it's a bit odd and off-putting to pray to a baby."

Bobby justifies himself saying, "Well look, I like the Christmas Jesus best, and I'm saying grace. When you say grace, you can say grace to grown up Jesus, or teenage Jesus or bearded Jesus or whoever you want." The wife replies, "You know what I want? I want you to do this grace good so that God will help you win that race tomorrow." Bobby refolds his hands, "Dear tiny baby Jesus..."

But that's the problem, isn't it. It's tempting to make God into whoever we want God to be. Whether it's a tiny baby Jesus who helps you win NASCAR races or it's a grown-up Jesus who acts more like Santa Clause than the Lord of the universe, or its political activist Jesus whose viewpoints just happen to perfectly

align with our own. Either way, it's a version of faith that can't carry you very far.

And so, this morning we have a bit of a corrective. Jesus is our friend, our brother and our bridge groom. But even then, Jesus must also be the king.

And what does a king do? What role is King Jesus playing in our lives and in our universe?

Well, sometimes in the church we speak of the "finished work of Christ." What was done on the cross has been done for all time. Nothing needs to be added to it. But there is ongoing work. What is Jesus doing today?

Is he up in heaven waiting for our facile prayers about sports car races? Is he distracted with something else even as the world bursts into war and division yet again? Is he getting kind of old, and his hearing isn't so good anymore...slowing down a bit and we're just going to have to pick up where he left off and run the football down the field for him?

Well, no. But that's why it's so important that we take the time to parse chapters like this one from Ephesians. Here Paul gives us a breathtaking statement of what it is that God is up to in the world even in the midst of our ongoing man-made chaos.

And the first thing Paul says that God is up to is this: He says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order

that you may know the hope to which he has called you."

So, what is God up to? He's opening hearts and minds. He's calling his children back into his family. But the curious thing is that he doesn't do this willy nilly. He works through the prayers of those who believe.

I'm reminded of the story of George Muller, a remarkable man of faith who in the 19th century ran orphanages for homeless and unwanted children. Muller was a man of great faith and powerful prayer.

It was said that one day Muller's wife came to him saying they had no food to give the children. So, George did what he always did. He prayed.

And in no time a milk cart broke down in front of their orphanage, and instead of letting the milk spoil he gave it to Muller. Likewise, a baker arrived with fresh bread saying he had been awakened in the night with a deep conviction that he should bake bread for the orphans. God loves to work through our prayers.

But there was one nagging prayer that God never seemed to answer. George had five friends who were not believers. He began to pray for them. Here's what Muller wrote:

In November 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single intermission, whether sick or in health, on the land, on the sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements might be. Eighteen months elapsed before the first of the five was converted. I thanked God and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second was

converted. I thanked God for the second, and prayed on for the other three. Day by day, I continued to pray for them, and six years passed before the third was converted. I thanked God for the three, and went on praying for the other two. These two remained unconverted.

But then, George Muller died. The two men were not yet converted. But in 1897, 52 years after Muller began praying daily, both men came to faith in Jesus Christ. A powerful prayer answered posthumously – right on time.

So, the first thing Jesus is doing now is building up his kingdom one person and one prayer at a time. But he's doing it on his time not ours, and yet he won't do it without us.

What else is king Jesus up to? Well, Paul writes, "I pray that you may know...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

So, what is he doing? He's establishing his rule and reign over the entire universe.

Here's what you need to know as background to this statement. At the time that Paul wrote this letter, Ephesus was a prosperous and prominent place. It housed the great temple to Artemis (one of the 7 wonders of the world). It was on a major trade route and so the people who lived there were affluent and comfortable. And it was a community that was

preoccupied with magic and the occult.

In other words, the Christian church was a moral minority and largely disregarded. And yet, Paul is praying for this little church. He's praying that things will change. He prays for the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened in order that they may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

But here's the thing: what is Ephesus like today? What is this once great and powerful commercial centre like now? It's not! It's long gone. It's nothing but a ruin, popular as a stop for busloads of tourists.

But what is the church today? It is a great and global body supported by a God who is busy building his church, and at times rebuilding his church the hard way.

But we live in a time when we are anxious about many different powers, authorities and dominions. China, Putin, Israel and Hamas. American political instability and Canadian too.

But here's what we need to know. Paul says to the church in Colossae, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." And Jesus himself tells his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

It's hard to imagine the implications of these words. If someone were to say this to you about their own abilities, you would rightfully conclude that this is a dangerous person, maybe even a lunatic! Or maybe the only person who could say such a thing – God incarnate.

A few weeks ago, we took a bus