

20th Sunday after Pentecost

15 October 2023

[Exodus 32:1-14, Psalm 106, Philippians 4:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14](#)

I suppose I am not alone lately in an extra mindfulness of the news of the world, which former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates says is a reminder that ‘it’s a pretty nasty world out there’.¹ A pretty nasty world is certainly not the intention of the One whose ‘Let there be’ spoke into being a marvelous creation beheld as very good. That goodness is marred by powerful forces. Powerful, yes, but also, because of the cross of Christ and his empty tomb, in the throes of final defeat, although not going down without a fight.

Our Christian hope is to live toward that final victory, described in the Nicene Creed as a kingdom that will have no end (BCP 326, 358). We are to live as if the kingdom of God is a present reality, like colonists, so that where we are the kingdom of God is a present reality. Nowhere is the present reality of the kingdom more apparent than in the Christian community gathered in worship, in the Holy Eucharist, the eschatological anticipation of the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

We come together knowing our need for a mediator to represent us before the sheer blazing glory of God’s holiness. Moses was that for his people when, a short while after making solemn covenant with God, promising, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do”(Exodus 19:8), forgot the sacred covenant with its prohibition of any carved image to represent God, fashioning a golden bull-calf, worshipping before it with sacrifices and revelry. Only through the courageous mediation of Moses were they spared from dire consequence.

As important and life-saving as the mediation of Moses was, it but points toward the one who is our Mediator and Advocate, he who is, as the Creed says, ‘Light from Light, true God from true God. . .who became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man’ (BCP 326, 358), our Lord Jesus Christ, who clothes us in the wedding garment of grace. Clothed with Christ, we can live in hope that the nastiness in the world will not have the final say, but that a newly remade world where evil is put away finally and for ever is a future that will break over the horizon.²

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6338908153112/>; 2:17.00.

² Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 52–53.

We who follow, are clothed by, clothed in Christ are colonists of this newly remade world, which makes this gathering an outpost, a colony of God's kingdom. To the Christians in Philippi, seeing themselves as colonists was a natural analogy, for Philippi was a Roman colony, a little bit of Rome set in the province of Asia in what today would be the nation of Turkey. Paul encourages the church there to keep on being a colony of God's kingdom within that colony of Caesar's. They would need to stand firm in union with Christ, because the gospel was not always understood or tolerated among those outside the church.

Essential to standing firm in Christ is internal peace and unity in the church family, so Euodia and Syntyche need to resolve their quarrel, whatever it may be. Then, with one mind, the church can keep on rejoicing in the Lord, which is also an appeal to persevere in faith, trusting in Christ, whose death and resurrection means that the renewal of creation, even when times look bleak, is not a question of if, but when, and there can even be seen evidence that the renewal is advancing.

As they rejoice, Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to maintain a public image of gentleness, even when faced with hostility, being ready to forgive, extend mercy, refuse to retaliate, and maintain their composure, while always praying the 'Maranatha,' more of a plea for the Lord to be near than a declaration of his nearness.³ That prayer, and all others, is to be offered without anxiety, because the anxious heart betrays a lack of trust, but the scriptures give bountiful witness to God's faithfulness, which provides ground for trust.⁴

Paul then says all of this will enclose their hearts and minds in a fortress of shalom, God's peace, giving them time to think on higher virtues and emulate him, whose life has become, not on his own merit but through the mediation of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, an embodiment of the gospel, to the point that as he dictates this letter he is in a Roman prison, and will soon share in the sufferings of Christ. Even so, Paul knows the God of peace is with him.

The news of the world is still with us. What will happen in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, Iran, Washington, Eagle Pass, San Angelo? Those answers I do not have, and in most of those places I have no influence, except maybe a small bit in San Angelo, the place the Lord has called me to be. For myself, then, and for each of you in whatever places you have a sphere of influence, may there be a sense of the gentle joy of the Lord in our being, trust in the Lord that frees us from anxiety and allows us to pray confidently and honestly, knowing that the Lord has built, to steal a phrase from Gordon Sumner, a.k.a *Sting*, a fortress around

³ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. II, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 175.

⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, 175.

our hearts, to be colonies of his kingdom, outposts in what can be 'a pretty nasty world out there.' But, it will not always be. The risen Christ has planted his flag on the world's beachhead. He has sent us, and others who, like us, are clothed in his grace, to share the good news that a newly remade world where evil holds no sway, will, in God's good time, break over the horizon. As we wait, we hope, we pray Maranatha, Be near, Lord Jesus.