

St. John's Lutheran Church  
November 25, 2007

"Thy Kingdom Come"  
Colossians 1:11-20

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I am currently reading Victor Hugo's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, "Les Miserables". In the book, one of the main characters is Cosette, a little girl who, at 8 years of age is living as a foster child with an inn-keeper and his wife. Cosette is treated inhumanely as a slave. One of her duties is to provide guests of the inn with water. To get the water Cosette has to walk with a large bucket outside of town to a spring in the forest.

At one point in the narrative Cosette has to go late in the evening to the forest to get some water. Victor Hugo describes the little girl heading out into the fearsome darkness. "Cosette passed through the labyrinth of crooked and deserted streets. As long as she had houses, or even walls, on the sides of the road, she went on boldly enough. From time to time she saw the light of a candle through the cracks of a shutter; it was light and life to her; there were people there; that kept up her courage. However, as she advanced, her speed slackened as if mechanically. When she had passed the corner of the last house, Cosette stopped. To go (this far) had been difficult; to go further than the last house became impossible. She put the bucket on the ground, buried her hands in her hair, and began to scratch her head slowly, a motion peculiar to terrified and hesitating children.

It was (now) the open country; dark and deserted space was before her. She looked with despair into this darkness where nobody was, where there were beasts, where there were perhaps ghosts. She looked intensely, and she heard the animals walking in the grass, and she distinctly saw the ghosts moving in the trees."

You, perhaps, have had your own experience with the fearsome darkness. The fearsome darkness is also a theme in Holy Scripture. In the Bible, darkness is understood to be a realm, a kingdom that has power all of its own. In the Bible, the kingdom of darkness is characterized by sin, death, and the power of the devil. If there is a king of the kingdom of darkness, that king is Satan himself.

In the Bible, the power of the kingdom of darkness is universal in regard to the human race. Every member of the human race who is born into the world is born into the kingdom of darkness. It is this condition of humankind that is meant to be documented in the Bible by the account of Adam and Eve at the very beginning of the Bible.

And it is this state of affairs that is behind the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Jesus was born into the world to be the means whereby God would confront the kingdom of darkness in the world on behalf of all humankind. Through his death, resurrection, and ascension to glory, Jesus is crowned as a king. He is the king of the kingdom of light. And his kingdom is characterized by the forgiveness of sin, redemption, and life eternal.

All of this is in the mind of the writer to the Colossians in our second reading for this Festival of Christ the King this morning. In verse 13 the writer speaks of God the Father "rescuing us from the power of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." And in verse 12, just before, we are told that this transfer is cause for us all to "give thanks to the Father, who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light."

It was the conquering of this kingdom of darkness by the kingdom of light that the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus was all about. Through that suffering, death, and resurrection, a light has been shined into the darkness in the world over which the darkness has no power. And the writer spends most of the rest of this reading exulting over the majesty in which Christ Jesus is, indeed, the king of the kingdom of light.

"He 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, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him." Christ the King is now the ruler over every other power in heaven and on earth, including the ruler of the kingdom of darkness.

It is the rescuing from the power of darkness and the transferring into the kingdom of Christ that every celebration of Holy Baptism is all about. It is what the celebration of Holy Baptism this morning at the 10:45 service for Emily Ann is all about. Through the water and the word of Holy Baptism, Emily Ann will be transferred this morning before our very eyes from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

And so it is that our reading this morning begins with a prayer. It is a prayer for every reader who would read the words of the reading for centuries to come. And the prayer is that all of the citizens of the kingdom of Light, that all of the citizens of the kingdom of Christ would be made strong in the strength that comes from his glorious power, in order that the each citizen might endure with patience whatever darkness might currently be in his or her life.

So it is that the prayer of the reading this morning, dear friend in Christ, is a prayer for you and for me. For we, too, are among those saints who have been rescued and transferred from the power of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son. In him we, too, have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. In him we, too, have the power to be made strong to endure with patience whatever is the darkness which we may be currently experiencing in the specific circumstances of our earthly life.

In the novel, Cosette makes her way through the seven or eight-minute walk from the edge of the woods, through the darkness, to the spring. But when she has filled her overly-large bucket with water and is heading back through the darkness she finds that now she has the added burden of the weight of the water which is almost more than her little arms can carry. She finds that she can only go a short distance at a time and has to stop repeatedly to rest. Finally, as she neared the edge of the woods, she "made a last halt, longer than the others, to get well rested; then she gathered all her strength, took up the bucket again, and began to walk on courageously. Meanwhile the poor little despairing thing could not help crying, "Oh, my God! My God!"

At that moment she felt all at once that the weight of the bucket was gone. A hand, which seemed enormous to her, had just caught the handle, and was carrying it easily. She raised her head. A large dark form, straight and erect, was walking beside her in the gloom. It was a man who had come up behind her, and whom she had not heard. This man, without saying a word, had grasped the handle of the bucket she was carrying. There are instincts for all the crises of life," concludes Victor Hugo in this section of his novel. "The child was not afraid."

The man was the main character of the novel, Jean Valjean, who would go on to purchase Cosette from the darkness of the inn and the inhumane innkeepers. Christ the King walks by your side through the sometimes darkness of this earthly life. He has purchased you from the realm of darkness. His strength is sufficient for you. Amen.