

The Seated Christ

When we consider the posture of Christ Jesus, it's typical to envisage him standing or perhaps walking as he teaches. The Gospels tell us he does recline at table, and lie down for sleep, and on Ascension Day he is doing something close to flying – being raised up in the air as he blesses his Church. But while Christ's ascending happens relatively quickly, it is the posture of seating that is the enduring, and even, eternal bearing of Christ the Lord, and the most powerful picture of the Ascended Lord.

In modern sensibilities, sitting has overtones of passivity and rest - perhaps that's why we rarely depict Christ as sitting, except perhaps with children or lambs. And yet sitting is the only posture of Christ we confess in the creed. It's also the only verb of Christ that's in the present tense. He was conceived, was born, suffered, was crucified, dead, was buried, ascended. But then the creed doesn't say he sat at God's right hand, but sits. The Scriptural witness gives us now a sitting Christ, who ascended in order to take up dominion as king, as ruler over the cosmos.

For to sit is not to relax, but to assume a throne of divine power. We get a hint of this in our law courts, which are not in session until the judge sits down. Indeed, the word "session" just means sitting. Our Parliament is "in session" when the Speaker of the House sits. God willing Her Majesty the Queen will live long and prosper, and yet nature's ways suggest that soon we shall see a King Charles, who at his coronation will be seated in power on the throne. His kingdom will then be "in session".

Today we celebrate Christ's kingship, that He is seated for us, and that he reigns in a threefold manner: a Kingdom of Power, a Kingdom of Grace, and a Kingdom of Glory. We're going to look at those three in turn, taking as our text the reading of St. Paul to the Ephesians.

The Kingdom of Power

So first the Kingdom of Power. Let's listen again to our text, verses 20 and 21:

²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

The Scriptures here and in many places, proclaim the power of Christ in a way that embraces not just believers but unbelievers also, indeed the whole cosmos. After all, the creation of the heavens and the earth was not just the work of God the Father. Rather in Colossians we hear that by Christ "*all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together*" (Colossians 1:16-17). Even before his Incarnation, God the Son ruled the cosmos. But now after his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, ascends to sit in a universal reign. When our text says he is "*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion*" most likely in view are not simply earthly authorities, but hostile spiritual forces and principalities. The point here being that whether human or demonic, whether benign or hostile, all power has nothing on Christ, it's all immeasurably inferior. Christ's is a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36), but a kingdom beyond this world, a kingdom eternal.

What does this mean? That everything and everyone in life is defined by Christ and under Christ. The sun, the Australian Parliament, the local café, demons and unclean spirits, your pets, your net worth – all come under the cosmic rule of Christ. So whether people acknowledge Christ or not, he is the ruler of all lives. We can sometimes be too taken with earthly power and rule, that lasts but for a moment, spend too much time following and seeking earthly power, and forget that far above these authorities, Christ reigns in power. His kingdom is in session. And so our evangelization of our neighbours is not to bring people into some strange new club, called the church, but rather to lead them to acknowledge and confess the Christ who already rules them, and who will come again in power to judge the living and the dead. As Christ himself to Caiaphas the high priest when on trial: "*I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matthew 26:64).

We sing of this Kingdom of Power when we sing the verse in "*Rejoice the Lord is King*":

He sits at God's right hand till all His foes submit,
And bow to His command, and fall beneath His feet:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

The Kingdom of Grace

Such is the Kingdom of Power, but Christ's session at the right hand of the Father is also a Kingdom of Grace. And the two are connected, as our reading continues. The same power with which Christ rules the cosmos Christ also rules the Church.

²² *And he [God the Father] has put all things under his feet [Christ's] and has made him the head over all things for the church,* ²³ *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Christ's power is not automatically good news, and can provoke terror as we heard in his words to Caiaphas. But God, being rich in mercy, has for you now made Christ's power the cause of all of your comfort. For Christ's Kingship over all things is for the Church.

And he uses his power for salvation, ruling the church his body with grace, forgiveness and love, all charged with the same power with which Christ rules the cosmos. All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ, and Christ now sits enthroned for the Church, his body – not to be served, but to serve.

For by baptism and by faith you are members of Christ's body, in which sin, death and the devil have been conquered, even as we await the day when they will be abolished altogether. And it's by Christ's ascension and being seated at the right hand of the Father that he now brings this victory, this grace to us. The book of Hebrews puts it this way:

"Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man." (Hebrews 8:1-2)

The word for minister here is in Greek a λειτουργός, literally a liturgist. Christ has ascended and is seated in power to be our liturgist, our minister, serving us with a cosmically powerful grace that no

other power can possibly touch. The sin that wants to rule us has nothing on the gracious rule of Christ and the powerful forgiveness he brings you now.

For Christ governs his Church through his Word, through Baptism, and through Holy Communion. His Church is not built up by any other human authority or power, but by Christ liturgising for us with His Word.

That's why St. Paul in our reading could say that for us who believe, the Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of our hearts – opens our hearts – so that we may have confidence in the hope to which we're called, and the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints. We have a royal inheritance so great that only a few verses later, St Paul can add that not only is Christ seated in heaven, but by grace God "*has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 2:6). We are with Christ in the heavenly places even now, already ruling and reigning with Christ and the apostles.

This brings me briefly to the final dimension of Christ's Kingship, the Kingdom of Glory.

The Kingdom of Glory

In Hebrews 2:8 we hear that, "*As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him*", that is, to Christ. The Kingdom of Grace is not always evident to our experience, and Christ's power is revealed to us in hope. For our royal status, and even Christ's reigning in power and grace is not always what we see, because of our suffering and sin, and also because the Kingdom of Glory is not yet fully revealed. We are confused, we are thrown by pretenders who we fear have authority over the earth, or authority over the church. Luther even said it can appear that the devil is on the throne. We doubt our own cosmic calling and royal standing in Christ. Our lives are in Christ, but they are hidden in Christ with God (Colossians 3:3).

And yet what is now hidden will be revealed. Christ already reigns over the Kingdom of Glory which we now await. In this Kingdom Christ's victory, and so too our victory, will be made fully visible. Christ's kingdom is in session, and our King is coming again soon in Glory. We who belong to this King will be revealed as his heirs. Confusion and sin will be gone, and Christ seated at the right hand of the Father will reign with eternal rejoicing and love.

This Kingdom of Glory we sing about when we sing at Christmas:

Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him; but in Heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;

Even as we await the Kingdom of Glory to be fully revealed, we nevertheless sing about it now too. For Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling even now in Power, in Grace, and in Glory.

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13b) Amen.