

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
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Dual Citizenship

Today we see Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, enthroned on the cross, bleeding and dying. We see this broken one on the cross and we know that, “all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” We know that this crucified Christ will rise again. He will be raised with glory and seated at God’s right hand to reign forever. We look to his full reign in the future, a time when all wrong will be set right, when all injustice will be corrected, when all sinners will be reconciled with God, and we are comforted. We know that there is nothing to fear because the victory over sin and death is already won. We know that ultimately Christ is King, and no earthly power can withstand him. Yet we are left with this image today, the image of Jesus on the cross.

The strange thing about Christianity is that for us there are two realities that are simultaneously true. Our Lord is all powerful, and yet he suffers and dies. Jesus is sovereign over all creation, and yet in obedience he submits to the powers of darkness. Christ is at once crucified and crowned in glory.

Because of this we can be citizens of two different kingdoms at the same time. We can be citizens of the Kingdom of God, where truth and justice prevail, where goodness and love are the norm, and we can simultaneously be citizens of the kingdom of the world, where suffering and sin color our every day, where brokenness and fear infect our hearts. If we ignore one or the other kingdom, we don’t have the whole picture, and we don’t live the truth. If we

only long to be with Jesus in heaven and constantly look to that time, we can miss the suffering of this world, the very suffering that Jesus came to relieve, and we can live without compassion. But by the same token, if we only see what is right in front of us, if we only see what is wrong with this world, then we are doomed to live without hope. So we hold onto our dual citizenship, realizing that we were created for the kingdom of God, even as we live in the kingdom of this world.

Christ's sovereignty is ultimate and absolute. Therefore we must not fear any adversary. Even death holds no power over us. It is merely a doorway to a new life in Christ. In a sense, death is the ultimate healing. Those who have died are beyond pain, fear and any suffering. For them we rejoice that they are in the nearer presence of our Lord. But we do not long for death. We do not seek it, even though we face it fearlessly. Christ's victory over death, rather, gives us the courage to live. We live for Christ.

We live under the sovereignty of Christ through faith, and therefore we accept our life in this world as a sojourn, a mission of mercy to bring the Good News of God in Christ to this fallen world. Even as we are subject to the same powers that put Jesus on the cross, we are witnesses to his surpassing power. We are sacramental citizens of this world, representing the power and the mystery of God's love and grace, living symbols, human directional signs pointing the way to abundant life. Just as Jesus came into the world to confront the powers of darkness, so we must, in our witness, always confront injustice and hatred, even being willing to lay down our lives.

If we follow Jesus' example of living in this world while belonging to another, we fulfill the obligations of our dual citizenship—loving this world in his name while working to

transform it into his kingdom. For if Jesus didn't care about life in this world he wouldn't have come into it and become a part of it. He would have simply provided a way for us to escape it. If the suffering of us humans meant nothing to God in heaven, he wouldn't have been willing to send his Son to suffer himself. He would have just assured us that suffering will end one day. Healing is perhaps the most obvious evidence of the kingdom of God unleashed in this world. Christ demonstrates his sovereignty by commanding illness and injury to submit to his will for wholeness and health. We probably demonstrate our sacramental love the most when we pray with and for one another that God's perfect will be done. That is our job this morning. We pray with and for one another, offering to God the things in our lives that are broken and need to be mended, the things that hurt and need to be soothed, the things that are wounded and need to be made whole.

We pray this morning for each other, trusting in the power of Christ to heal us, but that is not the end of our calling to pray for healing. We continue to pray for our nation, for healing of the fractures that threaten to undo us. We continue to work together to confront injustice and to reconcile. We continue to be witnesses to the love of God as we have come to know it in Jesus. These are one and the same obligations. The same power that can heal our bodies can heal us as a people too, and we are called to pray, and to work, for both.

So we come back to the image of Jesus on the cross. St. Paul tells us that as often as we celebrate communion we proclaim the Lord's death until his coming again. (1 Corinthians 11:26) In proclaiming Jesus' death, we are not admitting defeat or wallowing in his suffering. We are rather proclaiming the love that drove him to die on the cross. We are proclaiming the love that drives us into the world to be his nourishing body and reconciling blood. We cannot

proclaim Jesus' death without proclaiming his resurrection. But likewise, we cannot proclaim his resurrection without proclaiming his death. In his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ forever forged a connection between this world and the kingdom of God. As long as there is suffering and sin, as long as there is injustice, hate and fear, Christ remains crucified. But as long as he is crucified, there is a way, a path to salvation. "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

So at the same time we hold up the image of the crucified Christ and the glorified sovereign Lord, the victim and the victor. We always seek first his kingdom and its righteousness, though we never retreat from the pain of this world. On the contrary, we go to the hurting places on purpose to bring the balm of God's love and to bear witness to the fact that, "the sun of righteousness rises, with healing in his wings."

Amen.