

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

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Rio Rancho, NM

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SUPREME IN ALL THINGS

Colossians 1:1-14

Let me tell you the story of a man who lived two thousand years ago. Before he was born, his mother knew he would not be a normal child. An angelic vision told her that her son would be divine. Miraculous signs and wonders accompanied his birth. As a child he was religiously precocious and came to the temple at a young age to learn more. As an adult he left home to engage in an itinerant preaching ministry. He urged people to live for what is spiritual, not merely for the material things of this world.

He gathered disciples about him who remembered his words and deeds. He performed miracles to confirm the faith of his disciples, who maintained that he brought back

to life the daughter of a Roman official. He provoked opposition which charged he was a magician in league with the demons. Eventually he was brought up on charges before the Roman authorities. Even after he left this world, his followers claimed that he had ascended into heaven and that they had seen him alive. These disciples wrote books about his life and some of those writings survive even to this day.

I am speaking of course of Apollonius of Tyana. You remember him! He was born a short distance from Tarsus, the hometown of Paul in southern Turkey. Apollonius was a famous neo-Pythagorean philosopher in the First Century and a contemporary of Jesus. A worshipper of the pagan gods, his life and teachings were recorded by his follower Philostratus. The followers of Apollonius met the

followers of Jesus, and heated debates ensued about who was superior. There have always been rivals to Jesus, those who felt others surpassed this humble rabbi from Nazareth.

In fact, Paul would say in his letter to the Corinthians that there are “gods many and lords many” (I Cor. 8:5). Indeed! There were multiple pagan gods on Mount Olympus, some of whom appeared on occasion in human form. Some were part human and part divine, like Hercules with a human mother and a divine father. And there were many political leaders who were elevated to divine status, most notably Augustus Caesar.

The entire imperial theology of Rome was based on divinizing subsequent Caesars, making a god out of these very human emperors. In the ancient world, there were

many statues of Augustus Caesar, almost always in the nude to signify that the emperor-like the gods-was divine. The idea of a human who was also divine was quite common in the world of Jesus.

I have been thinking about the “gods many and lords many” of our generation. My goodness, there are so many to choose from. John Calvin famously said that the mind is “a perpetual maker of idols”, that is, false gods. So many people make a god out of their nation. The imperial theology of Rome has been replicated time and again within empires that have come and gone. Some make a god out of our nation. But why would anyone do that, really?

Others make a god out of sports stars. These athletic heroes assume a kind of divine status in our society, now

especially with their enormous earnings. For several years, I was a sportscaster and interviewed several “big stars.” I can assure you that the best way to get over worshipping athletes is to get up close and personal with them. The allure drops away rather quickly. Others do the same with entertainment figures. People with fame and fortune bedazzle us, even make us envious. But again, I ask, why would anyone do that, really? Celebrities of all makes and models ultimately have “feet of clay”, just like us.

Perhaps the most alluring god of our time is simply money, big money. The vast amounts of money that athletes and celebrities accumulate make them something of gods, not to mention the captains of industry swimming in cash. Have you noticed the aura that surrounds

billionaires in our time? I don't think it is a halo. Jesus himself knew that money is the ultimate god, the thing we most covet and desire. He warned, "You cannot serve both God and money." Still true. So again, I will ask-why would anyone turn money into a god? Paul was right, there are still "gods many and lords many."

Paul in the Colossian letter challenges us to know who we are and whose we are. We do not attach ourselves to these "lesser gods". The exalted Christ towers over all things and calls us to walk away from that kind of idolatry. We belong to one who is the "image of the invisible God, the first born of creation." In him the "fullness of God was pleased to dwell." We submit ourselves to One "in whom and for whom all things in

heaven and on earth were created.” He is ”before all things and in him all things hold together.”

We acknowledge him “head of the body, the church.” In him God “was pleased to reconcile all things to himself”, “making peace by the blood of his cross.” He is the “firstborn from the dead.” Because of his exalted status, he is to have “first place in everything.” In other words, the Risen Christ is supreme in all things. Jesus is Lord of all. And he is the Lord of my life. And the Lord of your life.

Our baptism reminds us that we have died with Christ and our lives are hidden in Christ. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price. We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to the One who would rule my life with love and grace. The Lordship of Christ means that I have given up trying to be the “master of my fate, the

captain of my ship”. That role is reserved for Christ alone. Jesus seeks to rule your life-every aspect of it. No exceptions.

When I was in college, I often heard a preacher who had a bit of an edge to him. Sometimes made you uncomfortable in a way that you needed. You know what I am talking about? So I heard this sermon over fifty years ago and I have never forgotten it. He described the process of conversion, the often slow and painful process of making us over into the image of Christ. First, our hearts are “strangely warmed” by the glow of Christ’s amazing grace and love.

Then our minds begin to understand what we are experiencing, that is, our thinking begins to change and change radically. Then our hands begin doing things for

others, acts of service and acts of mercy. Then our feet begin to take us to places we have never been before, engaging people we would not have met otherwise.

People so different from us yet now viewing them differently-as brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. So far, so good?

Then he stopped preaching and started meddling! He said that the most difficult conversion happens in our “loins”, as he said. That meant first our sexual behavior, the intimate part of our lives. The part we want most to keep to ourselves for ourselves. As a college student, that surely got my attention. But then he concluded on a totally surprising note. He said that the final frontier, the ultimate conversion happens in the rear pocket of our jeans (you remember this was Texas). It finally converts, yea, our

pocketbook! For this zealous preacher, the ultimate test of our conversion is our attitude toward money. If Jesus Christ is Lord of your life, your whole life, then he is preeminently Lord of your finances. And an amazing generosity transforms you. It is the climatic conversion money, when I say gratefully, “All that I am and have is a gift from God alone.”

Now do you understand why I have never forgotten that sermon? Was he meddling? Am I meddling? Actually, the better question is this: “Is Jesus Lord over your pocketbook, and all the rest of your life?” Maybe that is Jesus’ question to you and to me today. Something to think, isn’t it? Something to pray about.

So today let us celebrate that our Risen Savior is also the Lord of our lives. Every single nook and cranny. No

exceptions. From head to foot and everything else in between. Lord of all. Supreme in all things. A Lord and Savior who loves us with an everlasting love. A Lord and Savior who wants all of you. Friends in Christ, this is our calling and this is our challenge. Thanks be to God. Amen