

## Salvator Mundi

*"He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10)*



About 2800 years ago, a despot named Jeroboam ruled over the small kingdom of Israel. Well, they didn't think of themselves as small. After all, they were the ten northern tribes of God's chosen people who had separated from Jerusalem generations earlier. And under Jeroboam, they had won back some territory that had been lost under earlier kings. But compared to their much larger neighbors, they were still rather small and insignificant. The Second Book of Kings tells us that, though he was militarily successful, Jeroboam *"did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."* (2 Kings 14:24) Jeroboam's sin was to support a privileged elite at the expense of the poor and to use religion to perpetuate this stratification of society into haves and have nots.

Amos railed against Jeroboam's sin. The prophet became a thorn in Jeroboam's side, loudly predicting the kingdom's immanent destruction. Of course, Amos was ignored. But sure enough, forty years later, the northern kingdom of Israel came to an ignominious end when the much more powerful despot of Assyria got around to conquering it and sending its people into exile.

About 800 years later, another prophet took aim at the sins of another minor despot from the northern reaches of Palestine. Herod's lechery and pride, and his desire to save face with Galilee's elite, lead to the spectacle of John the Baptist's beheading. Forty years later, the Jewish leadership's bargain with Rome failed, and what was left of the Jewish state died when Rome sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

While humanity has evolved in some respects over the ensuing millennia, pride, greed and violence remain firmly part of our nature, as do their consequences of poverty and injustice perpetuated on the masses. Today, it's becoming fashionable for prophets to predict that the American democratic experiment will fall under the weight of its own sins and the rising up of greater powers. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Shortly after the beheading of John the Baptist, followers of a Nazorean whom John had baptized, having experienced his life, death and resurrection, awakened to a great truth. The truth was this: In the fullness of time, God will reconcile all things on heaven and earth under this man from Nazareth, Jesus Christ. This truth gave them a certain hope of salvation (*Hebrews 6:19*). Strengthened by this hope, in the words of today's Collect, they came to know and understand what they were to do, and received the grace and the power to do it. On fire with the truth, the first believers spread its good news of God's saving love across their world. Today, salvation in Christ Jesus is the foundational truth for billions, the wellspring of who we are and how we live.

Early in the life of the Church, this truth was given expression in form of a glorious doxology, a liturgical hymn of praise, that forms the opening verses of The Letter to Ephesians that we heard this morning.

The doxology first praises God the Father, who has bestowed upon us every spiritual blessing in Christ. Not just a bit of good fortune here or there, or relief from some suffering or anxiety, but every...spiritual...blessing. In God's plan, we were chosen before the dawn of all

that is to be his holy, adopted children through Jesus Christ. Even though our Father knew that we would turn away from him, he destined us to return to full kinship with him.

The doxology then turns to praise the Son. By his blood we are redeemed, our sins forgiven. The cross is the *"mystery of his will."* It simply makes no worldly sense that the creator would choose to be born, suffer and die as a creature for the sake of love. The mystery of the cross is foolishness. But, as Paul says in another letter, *"God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."* (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Not only are you and I saved by the cross, but in the fullness of time, Christ will gather up all things in heaven and on earth, a unity of all creation *"living for the praise of his glory."* (Ephesians 1:12) This is the truth of the cosmic Christ. He is Salvator Mundi, the Savior of the World.

We affirm our inheritance in this unity of praise every Sunday by *"joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory..."* (BCP 362)

I am amazed that the first Christians realized that not only did Jesus die and rise for them, but that his glorious love is destined to restore all that is broken in the world. To bring all creation into right relationship. Humanity, all living creatures, this *"fragile earth,"* (BCP 370) the heavens above - everything. They must have been divinely inspired.

And so finally, the doxology praises the source of our inspiration, the Holy Spirit. Having heard and believed the great truth of the Savior of the World, we have been *"marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people."* (Ephesians 1:14)

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The eternal glorious unity to which, in the fullness of time, all creation is joined by the great mystery of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Like the first believers, when we awaken to the certain hope of our salvation, we too come to know and understand what we are to do, and receive the grace and the power to do it. On fire with the truth of divine love, we praise God not only by the literal song we sing on Sundays, but by joining with Christ in his work of bringing salvation to all creation.

We praise God by sharing the good news of how we are blessed, chosen and destined for adoption as his children. How the riches of his grace have been lavished upon us. We praise God by righting the wrongs of the Jeroboams and Herods. By striving to eradicate the poverty, injustice and violence of our age. By restoring our broken planet. All this we strive for by the power of the cross of Jesus Christ working in and through us.

The mystery of the cross is really quite simple. It is the humble and foolish power of self-sacrificial love. By the grace of God, we join with the Savior of the World in reconciling all things in heaven and on earth by simply giving ourselves in love to the people, places and activities that life presents to us, from our awakening in the morning to our deepest slumber at night. With Christ's power sustaining us, as we go through our days in love, we will see the world being gathered into his welcoming embrace. May our song of praise be ever in our hearts, on our lips and in the work of our hands. Amen.