

## “The Eighth Day of Creation”

Rev. Stephen Milton  
Lawrence Park Community Church  
October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
1 Corinthians 15: 20 - 32

In today’s reading, we hear about the importance of Christ’s resurrection to the Christian faith. Paul is writing to the Corinthians. He knows that some of them doubt that Jesus came back from the dead. He argues that without the resurrection, then this new faith is worthless, just another new philosophy, just one among many. Paul reminds his readers that he has been risking his life for Christ, facing beatings from Jews and Romans alike. All of this is a complete waste of time if Christ was not raised from the dead. It is only through Christ’s resurrection that we know that Jesus was endorsed by God, that this new way of living has the full support and inspiration from God. If it doesn’t, then we might as well all just eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die, and that’s the end of it.

Our faith exists today because there so many people who agreed with Paul. They believed that Jesus was God in human form. By taking on our flesh and walking among us for some 30 years, God had presented a new way of living to human beings. Paul speaks of Christ being the new Adam. A new kind of human being, one who shows us how to live without sin, and how to be washed clean of our sins when we do make mistakes. Before Christ, it seemed like death would always have the final word. Governments, like the Roman Empire, used the threat of death to keep people in line, and killed those who posed a threat. But in Christ, God shows that there is a power stronger than even the state, one that can conquer even death.

Christians saw Christ’s life as literally world changing – a spiritual revolution, and a physical one, too, that would affect all of the Earth. For this reason, they chose Sundays to be their sabbath day. Jesus was raised from the dead on a Sunday, so it was the obvious day to celebrate this new, second chance for humanity. Early Christians remembered that Jesus had often said that He was the Light of the world. This reminded them of the first day of creation, when God said, “Let there be Light.” So, the early Christians came to see Sunday as the eighth day of creation, the second time the light came to the world.<sup>1</sup> Through Christ, God had recreated the world on the eighth day by granting humanity a second chance. This was the day humans were recreated.

This idea of the eighth day of creation meant that the number eight became a Christian symbol of hope and new life.

Early theologians noticed that in the Noah’s ark story, there were eight people on the ark. They were the sole survivors, led into a new life after the baptism of the flood.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Palmer, *An introduction to Early Christian Symbolism*, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 138.



For Christians in Paul's time, the initiation into Christianity came through adult baptism. Buildings created for baptism often had eight sides. This was also true of baptismal fonts, which were given eight sides to represent the eighth day of creation.<sup>3</sup> You can still see this in many churches today.



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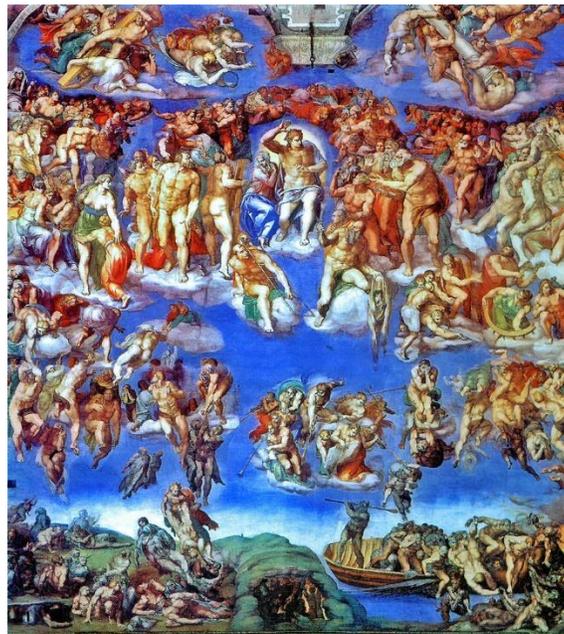
<sup>3</sup> Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, p.43.

Here at Lawrence Park, we have a beautiful baptismal font which is located at the front door of the sanctuary. It has a lovely urn-like shape on top.



But if you look at its base, there you'll find it is eight sided, invoking the eighth day of creation.

The idea of Christ as the eighth day of creation had two aspects: personal and cosmic. Through Christ's resurrection, humanity is shown that love is stronger than death, compassion than hatred. But the day of resurrection also points to the day when Jesus will return on clouds to initiate the second coming.



On that day, the living and the dead will be judged. According to the Book of Revelation, this will be part of a huge battle between the devil and God's forces of good. The result will be the final defeat of evil, and the creation of a new heaven and a new Earth.

That, too, in the Christian mind, was considered the eighth day of creation, when creation will finally be complete, crafted in eternal love, with evil vanquished.<sup>4</sup> So, for Christians, when we meet on Sundays, we are recalling the creation of the world on the first day, the recreation of humanity with Christ's resurrection, and the future recreation of the world in the end times. Past, present, and future, all at once, all on Sunday, the eighth day of creation.<sup>5</sup>

That grand cosmic vision of Christianity has been inspiring, but also dangerous. In the early 300s, the Roman Emperor Constantine endorsed the Christian faith. It became legal, and some decades later, the official faith of the Roman empire. It was Constantine who declared Sunday to be a day off for everyone in the Roman empire.<sup>6</sup> Later, it was the Roman Catholic Church that became convinced that Christianity was the only true faith, and that it must spread to every corner of the Earth. It believed that only through Christianity could souls be saved from hell, and only Christianity held the keys to the recreation of all of planet Earth through the final eighth day of creation.

You know the rest of this story – Christians have denounced other faiths, and forced non-Christians to convert, all over the world. Colonialism, evangelization, the Crusades, residential schools, sexual abuse scandals – the list of crimes is long. The idea that our faith has a connection to the fate of the world has been intoxicating and destructive.

It is little wonder that more and more people have been turned off from Christianity. Many have concluded that the world would be better off without any kind of religion. Faith breeds arrogance and certainty, which leads to violence and oppression. It would be better to follow enlightenment principles of human rights and reason and let the churches and temples close. At best, let faith be a matter of personal conviction, but don't let it get near politics.

That perspective makes sense on one level, but it looks like wishful thinking on another. The kinds of violent oppression we denounce among Christians have always existed. Long before there were Popes and Christian kings, there were despots – emperors, Caesars, Pharaohs. The desire for absolute power appears to be everywhere there are large scale societies.

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine's commentary on Psalm 6.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L Gonzalez, *A Brief History of Sunday*, p.29.

<sup>6</sup> Justo L Gonzalez, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 321.



When the Spanish first came to Mexico, they found Aztec<sup>7</sup> and Incan emperors who ruled with an iron fist, where people, even children<sup>8</sup>, were sacrificed to their gods.



The idea that some people should rule everyone else was not inspired by Christianity, but by our fallen human nature, which can be found everywhere.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion>

<sup>8</sup> Incans practiced child sacrifice: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/aug/04/why-incas-performed-human-sacrifice>

Stalin was not religious, but he let 3.9 million people die of starvation in Ukraine in the 1930s, so he could feed Russians with their grain.<sup>9</sup>

Mao Tse Tung was an atheist, yet his Cultural Revolution in the 1960s killed 2 million people<sup>10</sup>.

In Cambodia, Pol Pot's atheist communist dictatorship killed up to 3 million people in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

Does anyone really believe that if all faiths were to disappear that there would be no more dictators, no more Putins or Trumps?

History suggests that in every large society there are people who lust for power, and will lie, steal, and kill to get it. To get to the top, these people will bend and break rules, and they will always be attracted to institutions of power. In Russia and China, it was the communist party. Here in the West, the power hungry have allied themselves with Christians – Trump did it in the United States, Bolsanaro did it in Brazil, Orban did the same in Hungary. If there were no churches, these kind of power-hungry men would simply find other institutions of power to infiltrate and use to climb to the top. The desire for power, not dogma, is what unites them across time and across the world. The problem is human nature, which in some people leads to a lust for power to satisfy a sense of inner powerlessness. We can see the dangers of this kind of personality in Putin's attack of Ukraine, and Trump's attack on American democracy.

As Canadians, it is easy to see these forces in other countries as something that doesn't happen here. We have recovered from the madness of the residential schools, and we are trying to do better. We are currently in the midst of a peaceful municipal election campaign. No one is worried about soldiers harassing us at the polls. But the seeds of power mongering are at work in this election, too.

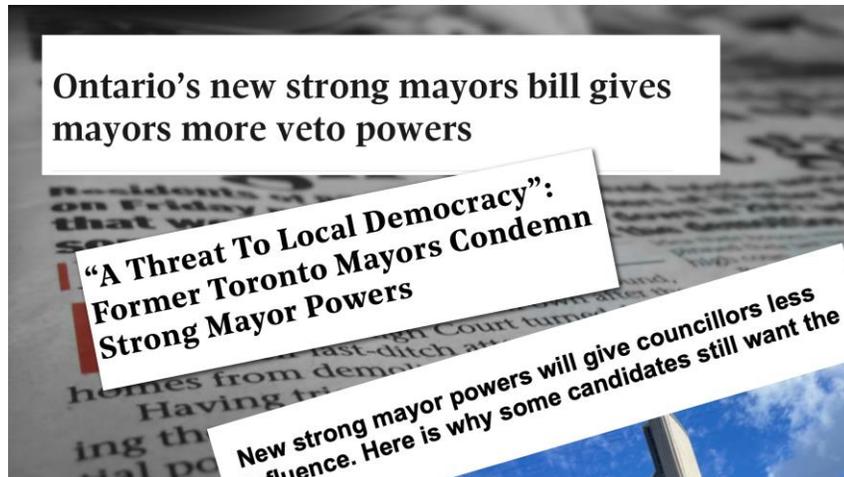
Recently, the provincial government rewrote the rules for how Toronto is governed.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/ukrainian-famine-stalin>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

<sup>11</sup> <https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/cambodia>



The so-called Strong Mayor legislation states that the Mayor of Toronto can overrule votes by council on matters like the city budget and housing initiatives. This new power comes with a condition: the mayor's decisions must align with the priorities of the provincial government.

The mayor can now overrule the will of city councillors on major decisions. This means that if your city councillor wants a greener city, and votes with others to adopt policies to that end, the mayor can overrule it, since the current provincial government is hostile to efforts to protect the environment. Or, if city council decides to reduce the police budget by a few thousand dollars, the mayor could overrule this, in accord with provincial priorities. The Bill does stipulate that council can override a mayoral veto with a 2/3 vote. But that kind of maneuver is risky – mayors decide who gets to be deputy mayor, and who can lead prominent committees.<sup>12</sup> Few councillors would want to risk a full revolt against the mayor and the province.<sup>13</sup> The result is that the city councillors we elect on the 24<sup>th</sup> will be less powerful, and less able to represent your interests, than they were in the last election. And that means that we citizens are less powerful, too. Our democracy has been weakened, and there has not been a huge outcry. This is how democracies are undermined, and it is happening all over the world.

So, what can we do to push back against this constant urge for power that weakens the rights of citizens? As Christians, we should remember why we meet on Sundays, the eighth day of creation. We gather to remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. He was not a king, or an emperor or a sultan or a tsar. He was a poor rabbi who was crucified as an enemy of the state, surrounded by jeering soldiers. Our faith begins with a man who was killed by politics, not one who wanted to take over politics.

The forces of history killed Jesus, but they did not have the last word. Christ's resurrection proved that there is another more powerful force beyond history. The Romans and all the other rulers since have believed that death is final, that the good can be destroyed. Christ's

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<sup>12</sup> <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/new-details-show-how-veto-control-of-ontario-s-strong-mayor-powers-works-1.6094669>

<sup>13</sup> <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1002234/strong-mayors-building-homes-act>

resurrection recreates the world by providing proof that God is more powerful than death. That God has a plan for human beings that will deliver us from the pessimistic view of violent rulers. In a world threatened by rulers with nuclear weapons, it is clear that human nature left on its own has the power to destroy not just humanity, but all of nature. What we do as a species affects all species, everywhere. That is not a cause for arrogance, it is just a fact. It makes sense that God would spend so much time trying to talk sense into us, because of all species, we are the problem child. What we do, and even how we feel, will change the world, for good or ill.

And that is why Christ's return on Easter Sunday was seen as an event not just for Christians, not just for humanity, but for the entire world. It was an eighth day of creation, a vision of a new future, where love, not hatred, prevails. Where life is not snuffed out by death. Where a commitment to compassion, love and understanding prove more powerful than any ruler. For the only way to defeat hatred is not with more bullets and hatred, but by providing an alternative. But it is not enough that individuals acquire this wisdom, since even if we as individuals get it, we will not last. We will die. And another generation will have to learn this all over again.

That's why God created churches to carry this message forward. Churches are like an ark that can carry the message of love and compassion through the waters of time. As others rage and declare that only power and violence matter, we are called to be Christ's body on Earth, to collectively keep this message and way of being alive. We now know that Christians are not the only ones God has been talking to – Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Indigenous people – they have all heard this message of love as well. There are many arks, not just one. We are all called to follow God's lead, to believe that compassion and love can replace hatred and greed as the operating system of this species and this world.

Our faith began with people like Paul who risked their lives spreading the good news of this different way of being. This second chance for creation. It is our calling to keep this joyful message alive, one that sees human flourishing as the goal, where people of all kinds can live in peace and joy. We will always meet resistance, even within our churches where the power hungry will be found. But with God's help, we can prove that there is a better way, by being that better way.

Amen.