

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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Clarksburg, WV

Colossians 1:11-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. (Luke 17:5N.R.S.V.)

Jesus Is More

There is a funny story that Forrest Gump died and arrived at the gates of heaven. St. Peter welcomed him, but cautioned that in order to get into heaven he had to pass a test. Forrest said that he wasn't very good with tests, but he was willing to try. St. Peter assured him that it was a simple test and that there were only three questions.

The first question is, "How many days of the week begin with the letter "T"?"

Forrest said, "Two. Today and tomorrow."

St. Peter said, "I was really looking for Tuesday and Thursday, but technically you are correct. So here is the next question. How many seconds are there in a year?"

Forrest said, "Twelve. January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd . . ."

St. Peter said, "Not the answer I was looking for, but again you are technically correct. So I will let you into heaven if you can correctly answer this last question. What is God's name?"

Forrest said, "That's easy. Andy. I remember it from the song we sang in church. 'Andy walks with me. Andy talks with me. Andy tells me I am his own.'"

In the letter to the Colossians, Paul is writing to a group of Christians who are facing persecution. They are not simply going through difficult times in their lives like sickness or loss. The people of the First Church of Colossae were suffering because of their faith. They were being bullied, made fun of, and in some cases imprisoned - all because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

So Paul wants to remind them of who Jesus Christ is. The text for today is a kind of poetry extolling the greatness of Jesus Christ. Scholars believe that it was sung as a hymn in the early church. This is one of the very earliest of hymns. The letter to the Colossians was written many years before the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This is a very ancient hymn indeed!

Wil Willimon suggests that this hymn can be summed up in a simple sentence. “Jesus is more.”

Many people come to church hoping to receive a sense of joy in troubling times. Maybe that is why you are here this morning. Jesus does bring peace and joy. The hymn Forrest was quoting is the old favorite, “In the Garden.”

The hymn says, “I come to the garden alone. While the dew is still on the roses. And the voice I hear falling on my ear . The Son of God discloses. And He walks with me and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own; And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.”

If you think of Jesus as the one who brings peace and joy, Jesus does do that. Yet, Jesus is more.

Some people think of Jesus as a good friend, someone who is always there for them. As another old hymn begins, “What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and grieves to bear.” And it ends with, “. . . do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in Prayer! In his arms he’ll take and shield thee. Thou wilt find a solace there.”

If you think of Jesus as the best of friends, Jesus is that. Yet, Jesus is more.

Some people think of Jesus as a guide, as a source of wisdom and help in making difficult moral decisions in life. One of my favorite hymns is, “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah.” “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but Thou are mighty; Hold me with thy powerful hand . . . ”

If you think of Jesus as the one who gives you guidance, Jesus is that. Yet, Jesus is more than that.

Paul reminds the Colossians and us that Jesus is the creator of the universe. And that all that was created was made to by him and for him. I don’t want to distract from this ancient hymn by going into a lengthy interpretation, just listen to this great hymn again.

“Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.”

Can you feel the majesty and glory of this ancient hymn? Jesus is not just a friend, a good companion, a comforter, a wise mentor. Jesus is God. Jesus is the creator of all things and all things were created to serve him.

What jumps out to me about that is that Christ is in charge. That is an important thing to remember when the world around us feels chaotic.

Some of you are old enough to remember when President Ronald Regan was shot. He recovered from the gunshot wounds, but for a while there no one knew if he would. The President was whisked off to the hospital and we all held our breath waiting for word of how he was.

Meanwhile back at the White House, reporters were asking, with the President out of commission, who is in charge? Al Hague told the reporters that he was in charge.

The media had a field day with that comment. They pointed out that Al Hague was Secretary of State and as such was not the next in line after the President. The first person in line was the vice-president, then the Speaker of the House, then President pro tempore of the Senate, and only if all of those people were out of commission, would the Secretary of State assume the Presidential duties.

All that being said, I felt some sympathy for Al Hague. The vice-president was out of town when this happened. People were worried and upset that the country was without a leader, should something serious happen. It was chaos. I think Al Hague was really just saying that until the vice-president got back, he had everything under control. Don't worry someone is still in charge.

I mention that story because in our own personal lives when something bad happens, we want to know who is in control. Paul wants us to know that whatever happens, Christ is still in control. Our lives may seem to be a terrible mess, but Christ is still in control. This bad thing that is happening is not going to have the last word. We may have to endure for a time, but Christ will bring about his good will for us and for the world. Christ is in charge and that will not change.

Listen as that most ancient hymn continues.

“He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

Jesus is not only the creator of the world and the one in charge of the all creation, he is also more. Jesus is head of the church. He is head of the Christian Church around the world and he is head of the First Presbyterian Church of Clarksburg.

One would hope that the members of a church would always work together for the mutual benefit of all. One would hope that just like the hands and feet and other members of our human bodies all work together for the good of the whole body - so the members of the church would focus on what is good for Christ's body, the church.

Sadly, because we are sinners, that doesn't always happen. Sometimes individuals or a group of people in the church get fixated on getting their own way on how things are done. That can tear a church apart. Paul wants to remind us that Christ is the head of the church. We may not always agree on what Christ wants us to do in the church. But hopefully we can remember and agree that we are all seeking to do what Christ would have us do. It is not about what we like or what

we want to do. Instead it is always about what Christ wants us to do. In Christ we find our direction and sense of unity.

A fellow pastor once told me about a time when his church was holding a major event. There were so many people involved that it was causing a traffic jam in the street in front of the church building. A harried looking police officer stormed into the pastor's office and demanded, "What in God's name is going on here!"

To which the pastor replied, "Everything! Everything we do here is in God's name." I thought that was a good answer.

Jesus is more.

Paul reminds us that Jesus is the first born of the dead. Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and was raised from the dead and ascended back to heaven. He was the first to conquer death. And all of us who believe in his name will also know life everlasting. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life!

Finally, Paul reminds us that through Jesus, God was reconciling all things to himself by the blood of his cross.

Time and again I have heard people who are going through sickness or trouble say, "God must be mad at me." It is a natural enough reaction. Paul reminds us that God is not mad at us. No matter what is happening, God is not mad at us. God is not out to get us. Jesus came to prove once and for all that God loves us and will go to any length to save us.

Jesus is reconciling you to God, but Jesus is more than that. Jesus is reconciling those we love to God. And Jesus is reconciling those we don't like and even hate to God. Jesus is the savior of the whole world!

Whatever we think of Jesus, he is so much more. In this moment of silence let us worship and praise Jesus the Christ.

Amen.