

Colossians 1:15-29 “Christ Supreme” 6/19/22

Two weeks ago, we joyously witnessed the confirmation of eight young people and welcomed them as members of the church; not only as members of the KenMawr United Presbyterian Church but as members of the Christian faith community.

Each of them had written a personal statement of their faith outlining what they believe about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the person of the Holy Spirit. As each of us has progressed in our own faith journey, hopefully all of us have grown in our knowledge of the three persons of the Trinity. But I wonder if we are confronted with the question, “What do you believe?”, are any of us prepared to give a clear and definitive answer especially to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?”

Our Scripture passage this morning is Paul’s message to the church at Colossae, regarding just that question – Who is Christ? The church was being infiltrated by those who considered themselves to be the intellectual ones; those who were dissatisfied with what they considered the rude simplicity of Christianity. One of their philosophical views was that Jesus was not unique, but merely a being or a force that is a manifestation of God. In other words, they recognized Jesus as one of the many intermediaries between God and man. They refused to see Christ as the center or the source of salvation, insisting that the task of humankind is to find the way to God by special knowledge, special passwords. These ‘Gnostics’ as they were known held a mysterious view in which they claimed to hold the key to unlock the mystery – that key was elaborate knowledge. Paul knew that this false teaching which had infiltrated the church was distorting Christianity and the only way to overcome the false teaching was with the truth. So Paul’s message addresses the truth about who Christ is and what he has done, the solid foundation of our faith. As we read his words, we can follow his train of thought addressing three basic questions:

1. Who is Jesus in relation to God?
2. Who is Jesus in relation to creation?
3. Who is Jesus in relation to the Church?

Paul provides the answers, all of which would teach the Colossians and all future Christians of the supremacy of Christ. And just what exactly does that mean? Very simply stated, It means that Christ is supreme over all things. It is **the reason**

Christ is central to all things and why we are called to live our lives as “Christ-centered.”

So, in answering the first question, “who is Jesus in relation to God” Paul says without pause that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. None have ever seen God. 1 Timothy 6:16 says that God “lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” Have any of you ever seen God? If you did, I’m fairly sure you wouldn’t be with us here today. But Paul states the truth; Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. When He came, the invisible God became visible. The word image or eikon as it is translated in verse 15 means a copy or an exact representation. Think of the image on a coin which was used in New Testament times and even today. As I told the children, If you want to know what Abraham Lincoln looked like you could look at a penny. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 summarizes it like this: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” And in the words of Jesus himself in John 14 we hear Philip asking, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus replies, “Philip, don’t you know me even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father?” Jesus is the image of the invisible God. If you’ve seen Jesus, you have seen the Father.

Paul next addresses the question, ‘Who is Jesus in relation to creation’? “He is the firstborn over all creation” says Paul. “For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” There is so much in that statement that is essential to our view and our worship of Christ. The title, firstborn over all creation may be somewhat confusing. We often refer to the child that is birthed first into our family as our firstborn, a child that was created. However, the term that Paul uses refers to the one who has the right of inheritance. Firstborn was even used as a title for the Messiah who would rule over and inherit God’s kingdom. In Psalm 89:27 God says, “I will appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.” As the firstborn over all creation Paul states exactly what role Jesus assumes in creation:

1. He created all things

2. He inherits all things
3. He existed before all things
4. He sustains all things

And Paul really does mean ALL things. In the same way that God did not save the world apart from Christ, so he didn't create the world apart from Christ. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in the great acts of creation and redemption. But Jesus not only created all things; he inherits all things. That's exactly what it means when Christ is referred to as the firstborn – He was the one who had the rights of inheritance. Again we can refer to Hebrews 1:2 which specifically addresses Jesus' rights of inheritance. It describes Jesus as God's "Son, whom he appointed heir of all things." So Jesus is not only there at the beginning of all things as creator; but he is also there at the end of all things as the heir of creation.

All this has referenced Christ's place regarding all that is created. But Paul also stresses that Jesus existed even before all things. Most of us have heard the opening words of John's gospel many times; often as we light our candles on Christmas Eve: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." Yes, in the beginning before anything had been created, Jesus was with God and he was God. He told the Jews, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I AM!" which was the divine name for God. Jesus did not come into existence – He always existed or as Paul says, "He is before all things."

The final role that Jesus takes in creation is that he sustains all things. All things are held together by the sustaining power of Jesus Christ. Try to digest that statement for a moment. The galaxies spin at his command. Every star, every planet, every atom and every molecule relies solely on his existence. And yes, every breath of air that we breathe into our bodies is dependent on the sustaining power of Jesus Christ. If Christ should cease to sustain, creation would cease to exist. How could we even question his divinity and his supreme power in creation?

The final area we want to explore this morning is "Who is Jesus in relation to the church?" We probably all agree that the church is called the body of Christ and as a body defined, there must be a head. Jesus alone fills that role. As a body cannot

exist without a head, so too the church body cannot exist without its relationship with Jesus, the head. Jesus is the founder and the ruler of the church. He founded the church on Peter's confession of him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus then is the very beginning of the church. But there is so much more! Without Christ's resurrection, there is no church; there is no faith. We as the church proclaim the good news that Jesus is alive. He is the firstborn among the dead. Because Jesus is the head of the body, and because Jesus rose from the dead, we who are part of the body of Christ will be raised from the dead, too. After all, how can the head be raised and not the body along with it?

If we were to summarize this brief scripture message, we can look at the final words of verse 18 where Paul writes ... so that in everything he might have supremacy. Another translation, the New American Standard Bible, states it like this: "so that he himself will come to have first place in everything."

This is the Christ that we worship. He is supreme over all things. There is nothing that exists without him. He is first, above all else, in everything. This was the message that Paul brought to the Colossian church to turn them away from the false teachings and back to the truth. Christ is central and deserves first place in everything. He is supreme over all things.

Christ is supreme because God is supreme and Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He is supreme over all creation because he created all things, he inherits all things, he existed before all things, and he sustains all things. He is supreme over the church because the church was founded on him and he is firstborn among the dead. This is Jesus Christ!

If ever you are confronted with the question, "Who is Christ in your life?" what will be your response. By acknowledging his supremacy, we come to understand the depth of his love for us. There is another age-old question that we are likely to encounter as we make our way through this journey we call life. That question is this: "Why am I here?" If we truly believe the words of scripture as Paul wrote them, then we can answer with assurance. I am here to live my life as a reflection of Jesus to the world; to bring Christ glory and honor, and that he might have supremacy in all things. God has shown us what he is like in the person of his son. Jesus Christ, is Emmanuel, God with us!