

Mission - Creation Care, Sept 4th 2022
Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-18.

After humanity's creation, we hear God in Genesis 1 and 2, give humanity responsibility towards and in his world. Humanity is sent you could say to do and be something. God gives humanity a mission.

The Anglican Communion described what the mission task, that the head is asking the Body to do.

The Five Marks of Mission:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- 1.To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom**
- 2.To teach, baptise and nurture new believers**
- 3.To respond to human need by loving service**
- 4.To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation**
- 5.To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

As a church of UP, IN, OUT, we believe we have an outward focus towards the world. So across these four Sundays, we will begin to explore what does mission towards and involving creation looks like.

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ.

Who is Christ? Right from the start of John's Gospel, John describes Jesus as God among us, Creator – the one through whom all things were made – and Saviour – to all who received and believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Paul describes Christ in amazing language in Colossians.

1.He is Supreme in Revelation.

Paul gets us going. Jesus is the 'image of the invisible God.'

A question in mission we may encounter – what is God like. The fact that God cannot be seen is fundamental to the Bible – he is invisible, transcendent and beyond our comprehension.

But answering such a question – what is God like – Paul, like John, replies: He is like Jesus. Jesus is ‘the image of the invisible God.’ Jesus is the projection of God himself into the dimension of space-time that reveals his true nature...

If we want to see what God is like, we look at the image... A Bishop once said: ‘God became local in Jesus Christ’. John in John 1 said: ‘No one has ever seen God, the only Son made him known.’ Here – Jesus – is not another holy person, or another good teacher, or another radical or revolutionary leader, not is he another god out of many... Jesus has not replaced God, He has made him known.

But images by themselves can be quite misleading. On Facebook we often see the ideal photo, or an older one because the current photo doesn’t look as cool or has more hair less grey whatever... and I am not talking about myself...

Paul does not say that Jesus is simply a representation of God. Paul claims – vi19 – that all the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus. Jesus is more than an image. He is God in all his fullness walking among us! For Paul he will not allow anything less than full divinity and full humanity in Jesus. In Colossians 2:9, Paul will repeat the idea – in Christ, all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form.’ Some would find it easier to understand if Jesus was a special man, chosen by God to teach and reveal his will – but Paul will not allow that. Or others can understand, Jesus was fully God but not fully human, God came to earth just with the outer appearance of humanity, like the Greek gods of old. Again Paul will not allow that. Full divinity, full humanity. John’s simply states: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

So, Paul asks us – do we have a big enough picture of Jesus? God reveals himself in many and various ways but he does so supremely in the man born 2000 years ago, in a stable in Bethlehem.

2.He is Supreme in creation.

Paul says Jesus is not only supreme in showing us what God is like, he is also supreme in creation.

Paul shares a cosmic description of God. At the heart of God's creative work is Jesus.

He is the 'first born'. This signified, priority of both time and rank. Another way to translate it 'firstborn before all creation.' No sense of him being created. We see the phrasing Paul uses: 'By Him' – he is the foundation of creation of all things, whether spiritual or earthly powers. By him – he is the agent of creation. For him – he is the goal to which creation moves. And Paul then takes us further – *he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Just pause on that. All things – by him all things were created. Things in heaven, things on earth, things visible and invisible. All created by him and for him. Reflect on that picture of Jesus

Consider. Our world is a tiny piece within a vast universe. The world we inhabit is one planet in a solar system – within a galaxy – within a universe. Our sun is just one of between 200-400 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, and earth is just one of at least 100 billion planets. There may be 10 billion white dwarfs, 1 billion neutron stars and a hundred million black holes – and that is just one galaxy out of possibly two trillion galaxies. We think of Graham Kendrick's song – that line I love – hands that flung stars into space – are also hands 'to cruel nails surrendered.' This link Paul makes v15-20 – creation and redemption. We are reminded in Paul's words, that our Saviour Jesus Christ, is the Creator Son of God.

Just as Jesus is Lord of the galaxies, he is the one who *holds all things together*. That phrase is important to many Christian scientists. Jesus is the one by whom the universe coheres. David Wilkinson: "To explore the universe through science, its consistencies and laws, is to explore the one who sustains it." P149. Science is a Christian ministry, as Wilkinson says. A medical student years ago wrote: "Jesus is Lord. It is

he by whom all things exist, it is he who spiraled the DNA helix, who choreographed the generic quadrille in cell division, who scored the hormonal symphony, and who heals the wounds we bind up. And by looking to this Lord, the doctor of Galilee and sustainer of every galaxy, we can day by day calibrate our behaviour.” P.149.

John Lennox, Lennox, an emeritus professor of mathematics at the University of Oxford, has written numerous books in defence of Christian faith and debated some of the best-known atheist personalities on stages around the world. He says that there is a widespread view that science and God don't mix. Yet he says, think of the rise of science in the 16th 17th century, the pioneers believed in God and most were Christian in one sense of the other. Galileo, Kepler, Newton. Kepler said famously 'we are thinking God's thoughts after Him.' Their belief in God, Lennox says, did not hinder their science, but it was in fact the motor that drove it. Because they believed in a rational creator, Science was worth doing. Lennox says, he is absolutely not embarrassed to say he is a Christian and a scientist because Christianity – Christ - has given him his subject matter.

Science explores a Universe ordered by the laws of physics. However science can never explain where these laws come from; it simply assumes they are there and are discovered; Paul says that the Universe 'holds together' or 'coheres' not because of an impersonal physical theory but because of the creative work of Jesus. Science, maybe you could say, is only possible due to the work of Jesus.

Science may help us understand the origin of the Universe; but to understand its meaning, purpose and value, we have to understand, that Jesus, the beginning, by him, all things were created, or as John puts it: ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

His far reaching salvation work.

Yet not only is he supreme in revelation, in creation, in all things, his work in the Universe involves all things, and so our next point.

So if we have a big enough picture of Jesus, then do we have a big enough picture of his work?

We can focus on our world, and it needs to change.

But we may have forgotten the importance of the conversion of the **individual**. David Watson – an Anglican minister – once wrote: ‘Revolution can change everything except the human heart’. Paul says ‘make the picture bigger’. V13, ‘for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.’ Jesus has delivered us.” At the heart of the gospel is the wonderful message that my life can be saved, forgiven, born again, empowered and renewed in personal and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the beginning, the first born from the dead, causing others to be renewed in the ‘image’ of God, as Paul says in Colossians 3.” P.151.

Some of us can focus on individual spiritual experience, that we have forgotten the importance of the **church**. We have lost faith in the structures of the church. Paul says ‘make the picture bigger.’ Christ is the HEAD of the BODY the Church. Theologian FF Bruce explained it this way:

“one thinks of the church as vitalized by his abiding presence with it, and his risen life in it; one thinks of it energized by his power; one may (without transgressing legitimate bounds) even think of it as the instrument through which he carries on its work on the earth. ” p.152.

The church is understood in relation to Jesus – we are not the church unless he is the Head. He is the source of the church and unless he is supreme the church dies. A writer (Dick Lucas) once said: ‘when the church takes its mind and heart away from Christ and his words, human authority and tradition fills the vacuum. The ultimate consequence of this could be sterility.’ P.152.

We can be so focused on the individual, or the problems, status, growth, challenges to the church, that we have forgotten **God’s world**.

'Christ is not only the source of the unity of the cosmos but also its reunification and restoration. Too often the image of Christ has delivered 'us', you and me, and led to a type of theology which ignores what God says about his purposes for the world. For Paul, salvation is about restoration and healing of the world. We may have reduced Jesus, Saviour of the World, to Saviour of me, or the Saviour of my church, or even the Saviour of the things that are important to me. Paul says, make the picture bigger.

So from v18 Paul is painting a much bigger canvas. God's way of salvation is not just for the individual, or the church, God's purpose Paul declares, is to bring in a new creation, the beginning of which is Jesus. Just as he is supreme in creation, here he will have supremacy in new creation. Christ has relationship to all things both in creation – v16 – by him all things were created by him and for him and v20 – reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven. We are reminded as we read v15-20, that the word 'all' appears 8 times, at least once in every verse, so it must be a bit important!

God will transform this present reality. We have a theology of the future. Romans 8 looks forward to the time when the children of God will be revealed and creation set free from its bondage to decay. New Heavens and new earth as described in Isaiah 65, 2 Peter 3 and of course Revelation 21. Our world was declared to be one of value when created – it is good. This world will be renewed, set free.

This is a vision of where God is going, that motivates our hopeful action today.

John writes: Dear friends now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So the here – what we are.

The not yet – what is to come, we will be like him, for we aren't there yet.

But John then says – what is our intention – down tools in hope – no, ‘everyone who has this hope in Christ purifies himself, just as he is pure. As this is the direction God will move in, we move as well.

He will restore creation, set it free, he has value, and so we move in the direction that Christ will do – to reconcile and thus restore all things in heaven and earth.

C Wright – ecological care points us to the restoration of all things.

“Ecological action now is both a creational responsibility from the Bible’s beginning – and also an eschatological sign of the Bible’s ending – and new beginning. Christian ecological action points towards and anticipates the restoration of our proper status and function in creation. It is to be behave as we were originally created to, and as we shall one day be fully redeemed for.”

Therefore every action we choose to take that looks this world, shows our wish to live in anticipation of the future that Jesus’ death on the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit guarantees, as we move towards the future glory which God will reveal through his creation. As we move towards improved air quality, reducing sea or water or land pollution etc, these acts point to what the Lord will ultimately do.

Conclusion.

How big is our Jesus, Colossians 1 asks, as does John 1. Jesus is the supreme revelation; he is the supreme in creation. And his saving work affects all things, on earth and in heaven.

In one day. He will have the supremacy.

Paul’s words ask us to stand back and get a bigger picture of the supremacy of Jesus in revelation, in creation and in reconciliation and thus new creation.

Shall we pray