

#36 15-16
Psalm 52
Amos 8:1-12
Luke 10:38-42
Colossians 1:15-28

Christ As Our Center Focus

I shall begin this sermon by reciting, as Paul did, this Hymn ~ or maybe it was a part of a liturgical structure of worship ~ which was in use before Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians!

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn 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.

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn 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.

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*Paul then continues in his writing, as if to put his thoughts in the context of the song which was widely used and appreciated already:*

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him – provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Paul is inviting the Colossians, and us, and the universe that will hear of the love of Christ as he shares it, to enter into a cosmic, divine, relationship. He is saying that for those who desire to know Christ as being the center of their lives, the center of their understanding of time and space and all of creation – for those people who seek this – they will know, “the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in You, the hope of glory.”

This is a radical difference from what the normal pattern of life seems to have been and still is for many humans. The most basic pattern of life is to live with a mentality of seeking worldly stuff – from a motivation of “I do not or may not have enough, so therefore my mental thoughts and my motivations are to be to acquiring stuff for this earthly life. This is motivated by the thinking that there is a limited amount of things available – scarcity thinking it is called. So when we think and live and feel from that place, our decisions will always be limited to our small worlds ~ our very limited knowledge and information.

But Paul is saying that there is a life beyond comprehension – a life of wonder and glory and miracles! Those who were mentally messed up and angry and doing evil things have a chance to become, “holy and blameless and irreproachable before him”! Wow! This may seem like a miracle! But it is not

some trick or magic or a miracle, really, it just seems like one to those who have not experienced the transforming power of Christ's presence and love in their lives. The welcoming nature of a brother of ours who helps us to know we are capable of great love and kindness – this is what can happen when we have Christ as our center focus of our souls. It is utterly transforming! Not only for us as individuals – but Paul calls churches, “The body of Christ.”

Paul was so living and sacrificing and dedicating his life in such an intense way because he felt the reason for his life was to build up as many communities of faith that he could. His reason to live was to respond to his calling, which was so profound, that even when he was suffering, the pain was not impacting his ability to feel Christ's presence and the drive to live more for Christ, teach and share more about Christ, share the glory of a life in Christ!

In these very troubling months that we have been witnessing all over the world, fear can take over. We witness some humans who are very, “estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds . . .” and we can wonder if and when this chaotic world will ever be reconciled – to become holy and blameless before God. And no one knows the answer to that. We can only hope.

We can hope that if we take Christ as the centre focus of our lives, if we strive to seek ever more wisdom, and not demand others accept our small world points of view – if we dare to break all cultural boundaries in the name of unconditional love and the grace and power of Christ – we might just make some amazing miracles happen – even if we never know about it. You see, we can make miracle happen and never know what we did. We can send love ripples out into the world and someone who may have felt estranged and hostile could feel love and reconciliation and we may never know we were the beginning.

So in the name of Christ we are being asked as a his body to break through all our old patterns of thinking and reach out into the world spreading miracles of hope and newness and wisdom ~ the wisdom that knowing Christ is the beginning of a moral change in ourselves and in the world. And this is so urgently needed!

This is why what Martha did in her home was so alarming! She had the opportunity to make listening, knowing, living for Jesus as a priority, and she chose work over grace and wisdom. We must make living and learning from Christ the priority for this representation of his body. And Paul is calling for a cosmic understanding of Christ, not an earthly one. And the cosmic view is always one based on justice and social consideration.

It could be very easy for us to give into fear and despair and scarcity thinking, but we then might have to change our name to the “Hyattstown Worldly Church (Disciples of American Culture)”. We are a church that carries the name of a man who has been described as being “before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn 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.”

This is the hope for the world – that we can be the body of Christ and create and evangelize others into a greater sense of sacredness and love. We must never give up the hope of making a difference for peace on earth – because we do not know what a difference our love and kindness in the world may have already changed someone from being a hostile mind into being a lover of Christ and reconciler to the world. And we so desperately need more and more reconcilers and peacemakers. May we be as persistent as Paul in creating Bodies of Christ and in having Christ as our Center focus. Amen.