

Majestic Christ  
United Church of Broomfield  
July 21, 2019

Colossians 1:15-28 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the one who is first over all creation,

<sup>16</sup> Because all things were created by him:  
both in the heavens and on the earth,  
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.  
Whether they are thrones or powers,  
or rulers or authorities,  
all things were created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup> He existed before all things,  
and all things are held together in him.

<sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church,  
who is the beginning,  
the one who is firstborn from among the dead  
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

<sup>19</sup> Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,  
<sup>20</sup> and he reconciled all things to himself through him—  
whether things on earth or in the heavens.

He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

<sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your minds, which was shown by your evil actions. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people who are holy, faultless, and without blame. <sup>23</sup> But you need to remain well established and rooted in faith and not shift away from the hope given in the good news that you heard. This message has been preached throughout all creation under heaven. And I, Paul, became a servant of this good news.

<sup>24</sup> Now I'm happy to be suffering for you. I'm completing what is missing from Christ's sufferings with my own body. I'm doing this for the sake of his body, which is the church. <sup>25</sup> I became a servant of the church by God's commission, which was given to me for you, in order to complete God's word. <sup>26</sup> I'm completing it with a secret plan that has been hidden for ages and generations, but which has now been revealed to his holy people. <sup>27</sup> God wanted to make the glorious riches of this secret plan known among the Gentiles, which is Christ living in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> This is what we preach as we warn and teach every person with all wisdom so that we might present each one mature in Christ.

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Last week, we began exploring the letter to the Colossians. Some reminders about context - the church in Colossae, like many churches, was experiencing pressure as it formed and grew.

There were many gods of various pagan faiths and this fledgling group of believers in the way of Jesus' teachings were simultaneously trying to stay strong in their new found faith, while also trying to understand it. In the letter, it began with thanking those in the church at Colossae – a lot of thanking. So, let's continue there...

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How often do you say 'thanks'? When someone brings you a cup of coffee, do you say thanks? When someone holds a door for you? Let's you cut in line at the grocery store? What does it take for you to say thanks?

I think most of our times of giving thanks are related to immediate actions before us. In exploring the letter to Colossae though, the author offers us something that we can be grateful for every day of our lives and even into eternity.

God loves us so much that we were given God's only begotten son. And Jesus died to give us life. We can marvel at this every day. The creator of this unimaginably vast, endlessly beautiful universe cared for us puny, dusty, bacteria covered, gassy, complaining, negative, petty, avaricious, ape-like animals - roaming a small spectacular planet - circling an average, glorious star. Verses 15-20 are referred to as the "Christ hymn" or the "Christ poem." This is because these verses seem out of place for Paul's writing style with their cosmic-like verbiage. Jesus, the Christ, is described and referenced to God in ways that describe imagery, the universe, the invisible and all forms of creation.

And who are we in all of this cosmic universality? We are things less than nothing. That's sounds insulting and perhaps a bit too rough, but that's not my intention. Think about it for a moment though. Nothingness is incapable of snubbing and abusing and hurting and demeaning and gossiping and betraying. Nothingness cannot block the Light, creating darkness - or replace love with hate and kindness with indifference. We are, in many ways, and at many times, worse than nothing in our existence and behavior. And God still loves us. How can this be?

Often, I'm not sure, but I think it's something worth saying "thanks" for, and it is always true, every day, including those days when everything seems to be going wrong, including times when we see the worst of our humanity displayed around us. I'm not sure if you'd agree, but that seems to be a lot recently. When one turns on the news or when you start scrolling through social media, it feels like so much negativity. So much with people, animals and the environment is getting worse. So, what's to be thankful for?

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Looking to the Colossian letter for guidance, we can be thankful for this mysterious and cosmic Jesus. The Messiah.

Through Jesus, God has "made us qualified." If our qualification were based on our behavior or nature, we would easily lose that qualification. But because our qualification to inherit with the saints is based on Jesus' character and behavior, we are safe. Our inheritance is secure. It can never be wrested from us by any machinations or schemes of the enemy of our souls because it is based on one who is universal, unchangeable, incorruptible and tirelessly persisting.

We might expect the contrast between the “power of darkness” to be the “kingdom of Light”, but that isn’t what Paul writes. In contrast to the power of darkness is the Kingdom of the Son of God’s love. You want to rid the world of darkness? Embrace the Son of God’s love. Love is the light that illumines the world and reveals evil. When darkness and evil are met with grace and love-when we “rise to the heights of meeting physical force with soul force”, when we are hated and falsely accused and we respond with kindness and consistency - darkness is defeated, and falsehood must flee. Love also leads to forgiveness, because while the Accuser reveals and proclaims all faults and through lies expands on them, love covers a multitude of sins, and seeks to make peace and to defend the weak.

This is the kingdom of the Son of God that is presented to the Colossians and to us; a kingdom of love and fellowship; kindness when facing pettiness, gentleness when facing violence, truth when facing falsehood, goodness when facing evil. The patriot of the Kingdom is the meek warrior - the one who brings unity where there was division and resolution where there was strife.

That was the message to the Colossians – one of unity and love. God is continually establishing this Kingdom among us.

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Following the Christ hymn, Paul continues his message to the Colossians, delving into Jesus’ reconciling crucifixion. Paul tells the Colossians that they were alienated from God, but no longer – they are now unified in relationship with God and all through Jesus, the Christ.

Much ink has been spilled through the centuries concerning Jesus’ crucifixion as a sacrificial atonement. Atonement theology goes basically like this:

God is HOLY. That means unholiness doesn’t fit in God’s presence, not even necessarily because God hates unholiness, but unholiness is undone wherever God is. For this reason, Isaiah was terribly uncomfortable when he had a vision of God seated on the throne in the temple. He said, “woe is me, for I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!” He said this because in God’s presence Isaiah felt he needed cleansing to be in the right place.

So, following the idea of atonement theology, the question is, what has to happen in order for us to feel at home in the presence of the Holy God?

One is God’s forgiveness and the other is God’s cleansing.  
For Isaiah, a cherub got a burning coal from the altar and touched it to his lips.  
For us, Jesus’ sacrificed himself on the cross, spilling his own blood for us.

The idea is that you have committed a crime – you have sinned. Punishment is deserved & the demands of justice must be met. Jesus took the punishment for our crimes. He voluntarily laid down his life, the ultimate penalty for any ultimate sin - blood for blood.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/8-eternal-reason-to-say-thanks-ken-henson-sermon-on-love-224903?ref=SermonSeriesDetails>

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Another perspective sees Jesus' crucifixion simply as the results of an oppressive, political regime murdering a rabble-rouser and political pain-in-the-butt. It wasn't God who murdered Jesus, but the Roman government. God just knew that that's how it would happen. Jesus' sacrifice at the cross wasn't needed for our forgiveness and cleansing, but his crucifixion demonstrated the lengths to which God goes for love of us.

Paul tells the Colossians that it's Jesus' sacrifice that brings about the new creation, a reconciling relationship with God that is greater than the laws - that allows them to rest assured in God's love. Jesus' resurrection and conquering over death allows them and us to be at one with God now and for all eternity. Paul warns the Colossians, that in light of the pressures they're experiencing in a chaotic and evil society they must remain rooted in faith, always hopeful for the peace that will come because of Jesus' death and resurrection. The same thing I say to you; remain rooted in faith, rooted in love and rooted in community.

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During the Second World War, German paratroopers invaded the island of Crete. When they landed at Maleme, the islanders met them, bearing nothing other than kitchen knives and hay scythes. The consequences of resistance were devastating. The residents of entire villages were lined up and shot.

Overlooking the airstrip today is an institute for peace and understanding founded by a Greek man named Alexander Papaderous. Papaderous was just six years old when the war started. His home village was destroyed and he was imprisoned in a concentration camp. When the war ended, he became convinced his people needed to let go of the hatred the war had unleashed. To help the process, he founded his institute at this place that embodied the horrors and hatreds unleashed by the war.

One day, while taking questions at the end of a lecture, Papaderous was asked, "What's the meaning of life?" There was nervous laughter in the room. It was such a weighty question. But Papaderous answered it.

He opened his wallet, took out a small, round mirror and held it up for everyone to see. During the war he was just a small boy when he came across a motorcycle wreck. The motorcycle had belonged to German soldiers. Alexander saw pieces of broken mirrors from the motorcycle lying on the ground. He tried to put them together but couldn't, so he took the largest piece and scratched it against a stone until its edges were smooth and it was round. He used it as a toy, fascinated by the way he could use it to shine light into holes and crevices.

He kept that mirror with him as he grew up, and over time it came to symbolize something very important. It became a metaphor for what he might do with his life.

I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the black places in the

hearts of men—and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.<sup>2</sup>

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Paul spoke of suffering for them. He continued the work of Jesus by “completing it with a secret plan that [had] been hidden for ages and generations, but ...[was] revealed to [God’s] holy people (1:26).” The secret is that Christ lived in them. Christ lives in you. The Christ, the Alpha, the Omega, the co-creator of the universe, lives inside of you. It is the hope of glory. As Paul gladly submitted himself to be a servant of the good news, he willingly accepted that until the kingdom of heaven is fully revealed in earth as it is in heaven, it means that suffering is inevitable.

Alexander Papaderous suffered at the hands of an oppressive regime. He took that suffering and turned it into hope and peace. He released pain and hurt, providing for others an image of the God that is both earthly and heavenly, a light to embrace and reflect.

May we remember the extent of God’s sacrificial love and merciful grace. May we demonstrate the wisdom of our maturity in Christ’s teachings by putting ourselves forth as servants of the good news and in our sufferings. May we be a fragment that reflects light into the dark places of this world.

AMEN.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Fulgham, *It Was On Fire When I Laid Down On It*