

November 24, 2019    Who Is Jesus?    Colossians 1:11-20

This morning's service is a preparatory service. We are preparing for what is about to begin. And what is about to begin is the season of Advent. Advent consists in time of the four weeks and a bit that run up to the celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Surely if we are to celebrate His birth, we need to be very clear about who Jesus is. And notice I said, who HE is, not who HE was. As the creed says, Jesus "was crucified, dead and buried, HE descended to the dead, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day (a Sunday) HE rose again." Having died, HE was. But being raised from the dead HE is, alive, and still active, alive and with us. So for clarity the question is, Who is this Jesus whose birth is so significant to mankind, that believers mark his birth every year on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, and that people who do not believe in HIM, or fail to see the full significance of HIM, nonetheless, participate in the party with trees and wreaths and decorations, gifts and feasts. The truth is that the world virtually becomes still for a minimum of 24 hours, and celebrations continue for the balance of a week. Even World War 1 came to a halt such was the undeniable power of the moment which is Christmas Day! Who Is Jesus?

The apostle Paul wrote the Colossian letter to a church in the Greek city of Colossae. And you need to remember that as a letter it was not divided into chapters and verses. It simply rolled on from sentence to sentence. Hence

the awkwardness of the reading I chose, beginning at verse 11. In some ways it is an arbitrary place to begin. I began there because of where it leads. Paul reminds us all who Jesus is, making 9 points. And the one he begins with is this: Jesus is the one in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. I want you to notice two things. Paul does not say, some people believe this, or even we believe this. He states it as the certainty of an undeniable fact of his own experience. Jesus is the one in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the Redeemer. In HIM and only in HIM we are forgiven our sins. Remember this that claim is not made by any other major religious figure in the history of the world. Who is Jesus? He is the Redeemer. In HIM and HIM alone we find forgiveness for our sins.

If I do not dash on, we will not get through all nine. Who is Jesus? Paul states as one who opposed the Christian cause, in fact wanted to stamp it out, until Jesus risen from the dead met him on the road to Damascus, and redeemed him. Paul says, as his second point in answer to this morning's question, " HE is the image of the invisible God." If we are going to ask the question, what does God look like, the answer is, HE looks like Jesus. He heals people who are sick. He loves people you would not expect HIM to like. On Calvary's cross HE died once for all. And then rose to life to make the very point these claims are true. In Jesus we meet not just the power of God or the love of God, we meet God HIMSELF. That is why we are

here and why we do what we do? Who is Jesus? HE is divinity in flesh and blood.

Who is Jesus? HE is the firstborn of all creation. You and I are the children of God, by HIS grace, and through faith. We are in that sense all of us, sons of God. But Jesus is in that category the first born. As we like to say in the English slang (which does not involve English) HE is “numero uno”. In other words HE is in a category all by HIMSELF. HE has not simply a special relationship to God, HE is unique in HIS relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. One of my Presbyterian friends who was raised as a Roman Catholic would say...”there’s that language about the Trinity”. And yes, I confess, language almost fails us as we try to answer the question who is Jesus because we are talking about the first born of all creation.

Who is Jesus? Paul’s 4<sup>th</sup> point is that “by HIM were all things created, in heaven, on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, rulers or authorities.” The sense of it is that nothing that was created was created without HIS doing it. John drew the same conclusion when he wrote about Jesus, “In the beginning was the Word...and without HIM was not made anything that was made.” He and Paul both say the answer to Who Is Jesus has to include HE was the word of God’s power that brought things into being in creation. “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.”

Who is Jesus? Paul says that all things were created by HIM and for HIM. That the created world including you and I

were created for HIM is about both the meaning of life in general, and the answer to the question what is my destiny? I am not here just to satisfy myself. I am here for others because God calls me to be here for others. I am my brother's keeper; I am here to love my neighbour, and first and foremost I am here to fulfil the purpose that God had in mind when HE breathed life into my body, when HE caused the cells to divide that formed me in my mother's womb. That I and the rest of creation were created for Jesus means "my chief end is to glorify God, to glorify HIM and enjoy HIM forever." As it says in the shorter catechism.

Paul 6<sup>th</sup> point in answering the question, Who Is Jesus? Is that Jesus is before all things. Science in pursuing the question how did the universe begin has taught us the phrase, the big bang. Jesus was, existed before that. And if science ever manages to identify the ignition point of the big bang process, Jesus was before that. And in the study of Creation processes, they will never discover a point that Jesus was not before. HE is (notice the tense of the verb) HE is.... before all things.

And then Paul says, (I am using the KJV here of verse 17, "and by HIM all things consist." Our modern translation puts it in these words. "In HIM all things hold together." That my body is made up mostly of water, and yet I don't burst like a bubble and run all over the floor is because of Jesus. The reason the planets hang where they are, the stars remain in the night sky in relative order is because of Jesus. The reason there is

order in the creation (which is why science exists and can study it) is Jesus. The reason the human mind can cause us to use words and compose an argument, or a symphony or a country song...is Jesus. If something holds together it is an indication of Jesus presence and power and grace.

Who Is Jesus? Paul says, "HE is the head of the church." A reminder that the church as an organization and a collection of souls is not mine, nor yours. It is HIS. A reminder too that as much as denominational traditions and structures may be meaningful to us, each denomination, including The Presbyterian Church In Canada, can only hope to be a part of His church. For all the attempts of men to build kingdoms within the church, the church has only one head. Again HE and HE alone is the head of the Church. Without Jesus we are nothing.

Finally, Paul says the answer to "Who IS Jesus?" Is incomplete without our including this: "HE is the beginning and the first born from among the dead, so that in everything HE might have the supremacy." Jesus said to those who argued in HIS time that there could not be a resurrection of the dead, that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of both the living and the dead. There is nothing over which HE is not supreme.

Verses 19 and 20 complete the circle by returning to that with which Paul began this part of his teaching. Verse 19 says that it pleased God that HIS fullness should be in Jesus.

Saying again that the disciples and early church fathers got it right when they said Jesus is God. And in verse 20 Paul repeats that Jesus is the Redeemer and tells us how HE redeemed us. “Through HIM (that is Jesus) God reconciled to himself all things on earth, or things in heaven by making peace through HIS blood shed on the cross.”

That’s who Jesus is. And therefore these are reasons why we celebrate HIS birth, and the whole of the world falls silent in the presence of that celebration.

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for every part of the year. But especially we thank you at this time for the celebration in which we are about to participate of Advent and Christmas. Be with us as we light candles and celebrate the holy night on which Jesus was born. Be with us as we imitate the wise men in gift giving, recognizing that the truly wise search for HIM until they find HIM. Be with us as we seek to help others given that HE came to seek and to save all who need new life through faith. We praise your name with the angels and the shepherds. Amen