

Good Morning,

Starting last Sunday, continuing into this Sunday and onward for the next two Sundays, all our second Bible readings are from the book of Colossians. Those wise and wonderful people who determine what Bible lessons we read on Sunday have decided that now is the time for Christians to cover the book of Colossians. We Lutherans are on a three year cycle with our Sunday morning Bible readings. Therefore, this year we read certain parts of Bible, next year different ones, the year after that different ones, and then we start over with this year's readings again. Well, pretty much, nowhere else in the three years do you get to hear anything about Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae, and then in the middle of summer, you get it all in one go. Since

we only get a chance at Colossians once every three years, I figured why waste an opportunity. So today you're going to get a sermon on our reading from Colossians.

In today's reading of Colossians, we had a few verses that really make the theological core of the whole letter. Verse 15-20 make what is called the "Christ Hymn." In English it just reads a bunch of dense descriptions about Jesus, but in the Greek language it is supposed to roll out in a very poetic sort of way and was probably used by early Christians as a pretty piece of liturgy. The way we sing "Lamb of God" before communion. Verses 21-28 reflect the substance of most of the book of Colossians and are concerned with our actions, the ethical behavior of a Christian community.

Today's reading can be broken down in two parts, verses 15-20 and 21-28. Well, actually the whole book of Colossians also breaks down into two parts. One part is theological. The other part is practical.

Verses 15-20, the "Christ Hymn", is really the best of the theological part. These verses are basically the content of our Christian beliefs, our theology. I can summarize what Paul is getting at in a word: "Jesus". In Colossians, what we specifically get from Paul is one of the earliest theological articulations of Jesus as all-powerful in His divinity. There really is a lot of good stuff to just the first "Christ Hymn" section of today's reading from Colossians, so you'll get a sermon today focused on the Christ Hymn specifically. Remember, this

sermon, because in three years, we'll come back to it, and then I'll give you the other half. No, I'm kidding. Well' come back to Colossians in two Sundays. The Colossians reading for the first of August is a fun one.

Many early Christians believed that Jesus was God. And in just a few densely packed verses, Paul is playing out what it means for Jesus to be God. It means that Jesus was there at creation and created everything that exists. If God created the universe, and Jesus is God, then Jesus was around before anything was created and actually did the creating.

Then Paul writes this cool little bit in verse 17: "and in Him all things hold together." Which means that as life has continued to roll on since the beginning

of time, Jesus was actively involved in sustaining and perpetuating creation. If Christians believe in an active God, that God is involved in the world, that God cares about you and has intentions for you; then we Christians are also to believe that Jesus has been there with humanity the whole time sustaining us with His care and good intentions. This really big, all-powerful Jesus is often called the cosmic Jesus.

So, the early Christians discovered pretty quick that cosmic Jesus was really important. Back then, just like today, people have all these questions about life and existences. Was the world created good or was it set in motion and kept in motion by cold and indifferent cosmic laws? Is the world even ordered at all? Are the spiritual and divine realities, if they even exist at all, are they

accessible to human beings? Does God have intentions for His creation? Is there a plan, a reason for all this? Is the world cold and uncaring and it is up to us to scrap together some meaning out of nothing? Did God create the world as a good place for us? Or is this some kind of testing ground from which to escape? If God does have intentions for our lives, what are they? How are they made known to us? Can we even live in accordance with God's intentions for us?

I know I got really heavy on us for a moment there. But people, then and now, wonder about this kind of stuff. You don't have to be going through a mid-life crisis or be an undergraduate on the wacky tobacky to think about the meaning of life. If you just slow down a bit, and get a drink or have a meal with a friend or a partner, this sort of stuff is

allowed to come up, and it makes for good conversation.

Well, Christians, then and now, needed a way to get at these questions. If this whole Christian thing is going to matter, if our faith is to be relevant, then Christianity needs a way to engage these deeper questions of life. It was while wrestling with these questions and a world that asked such questions that early Christians like Paul came upon the fundamental definition of what it means to be a Christian: Christians are people who look to Christ in order to answer the questions of life. And if Christians are going to have more than a superficial engagement of the world, then we need a Jesus that can get in deep into our questions and our wonderings.

It is the cosmic Jesus, the all-powerful Jesus, that can hang in there in a conversation about evolution. It is the Jesus that created all that is, heaven and earth, the Jesus that sustains all things, and the Jesus that will bring everything and everyone to an end and new beginning in accordance with His redemptive purposes, that Jesus can jump in to the deep end of a question like: “Will I get to hang out with my Muslim friend, Yasir, in heaven?” The cosmic Jesus being hand over in Colossians is not only good theology, it is necessary theology.

Verse 18-20 make up the rest of the “Christ Hymn”. Verses 15-17, establishes that Jesus is powerful. Verses 18-20, tell us what Jesus does with all His power. Knowing what Jesus can do, we move into hearing what He

does do. Jesus “reconciles all things” to God. The hymn covers the past, all the creation stuff, and the future. And as for the future, as for our future, it is reconciled, it is redeemed.

The term “peace” is used in the lesson to describe what’s to come in Jesus Christ. Everything will be at peace in Jesus. And let me emphasize “everything”. Think of someone you dislike. You’ll be at peace with them. Can you think of parts of the world that are in perpetual conflict? There’ll be peace there. You know what? Even naturally occurring tragedies, like earthquakes and cancer, Christ’s peace will even reign over and redefine those things as well. Paul and the early Christians knew that if you were going to get to such a big conclusion, you’ve

got to go in big. You’ve got to give people a cosmic Jesus.

I remember when I was just getting into this whole Christian thing in High School. The Holy Spirit was working away at me, but wasn’t really jumping head first. I remember thinking what’s the big deal with Jesus, anyway. These Christians sure like to make a big to-do about Him. Really, God’s the big show. When you got God, how necessary is Jesus really? God’s all-powerful, beyond description. I was really fascinated with the notion of God early on. It took me 7 years, before it really clicked in my faith journey: “Jesus is God!” It was then that I started redefining my understanding of the world and people around me through Jesus. It was after I had already made this shift, that I looked back realizing what was happening and

asked myself: “When did I become a Christian?”

We Christians make sense of the world through Jesus. What’s God like? Well, let’s turn to Jesus, and see what Jesus shows us and tells us about God. That would be a fun discussion at a baseball game, or in a bar, or at lunch with your pastor on a Thursday. But Tuesdays would work for me too. Is there a purpose and meaning to my existence? Well, Jesus sure thought so. He thought you were worth saving, worth dying for in fact. Jesus, also entrusts humanity into your care by calling you to love your neighbor. I think Jesus thinks pretty highly of your purpose in life to give you an important job like loving His people.

We have a cosmic Jesus. A big, all-powerful, there at the beginning and till

the end, divine Jesus. And that Jesus’s love and intentions for you are no less grandiose than He is. You are loved mightily by a mighty Jesus. In the confidence that we are so deeply loved, we can go ahead a risk asking the deeper, scarier of questions of our lives.

May you be blessed in hearing God’s Word today, as I have been blessed in preaching it. Amen.