

One Giant Step
Colossians 1:15-23
July 21, 2019

Last week, I preached on the first half of chapter one of the book of Colossians. We talked about what it means to be “in Christ.” Being in Christ means we have a beauty within us as forgiven, chosen, grace-filled children of God.

Today I continue with that first chapter of Colossians as we talk about who this Christ is that is in us. Before I read our scripture passage, let us pray:

Majestic God, we open the Scriptures needing to see you as you are instead of the small, manageable, accommodating God we make you out to be. Pierce us with truth and light. In these words give us a vision of the God of the universe whose power and might evoke awe in the hearts of the truly humble. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

Read Colossians 1:15-23

Yesterday was the 50th anniversary of the walk on the moon. July 20, 1969. Do you remember where you were? 530 million people around the world watched that one small step on their television screens. At the time, it was the largest TV audience ever. I remember it was a hot night in Minneapolis, and I ran across the street to my girlfriend’s house, and we were glued to the TV in wonder and awe with the rest of those 530 million people.

Even though Armstrong and Aldrin placed the American flag on the moon, this achievement belonged to the whole human race. You need to go back to Christmas Eve, 1968, 7 months earlier. Apollo 8 was orbiting the moon. On their 4th orbit, the astronauts looked and saw something they weren’t expecting. All of their training and focus was on the moon and its surface as they traveled above it. There was no plan for what they saw as they completed that 4th orbit. They saw the earth rising over the moon.

Frank Borman, the expedition's commander, later described it this way: "I happened to glance out of one of the still-clear windows just at the moment the Earth appeared over the lunar horizon. It was the most beautiful, heart-catching sight of my life, one that sent a torrent of nostalgia, of sheer homesickness, surging through me. It was the only thing in space that had any color to it. Everything else was either black or white, but not the Earth."

The astronauts, Borman, Lovell, Anders, were giddy with excitement. A cockpit voice recorder preserved their conversation as they sounded like a trio of tourists:

"Oh, my God," says Borman, "look at that picture over there! Here's the Earth comin' up. Wow, that is pretty!"

"Hey, don't take that," says Anders, "it's not scheduled."

Borman just laughs. "You got a color film, Jim?"

Anders has a change of heart. "Hand me that roll of color quick, will you?"

"Oh, man, that's great," marvels Lovell, looking out the window.

"Hurry, quick," says Anders.

"Take several of them! Here, give it to me," says Lovell.

"Calm down, Lovell," says Commander Borman, amusement in his voice.

The sight of the first Earthrise ever witnessed by human beings turned those highly-trained, disciplined, military officers into a bunch of awestruck kids.

Anders is the one who took the famous picture of that earth-rise. It made it on the cover of every magazine and front page of every newspaper. The editor of *Saturday Review* said, "What was most significant about the lunar voyage was not that men set foot on the moon, but that they set eye on the Earth."

It was a massive change of perspective: the view from the moon of the Earth floating in space. It changed how we viewed and thought about our earth. It even started the environmental movement.

Our scripture passage today presented a massive change of theological perspective. The world back then was in a shadow of an empire: the Roman Empire, an empire that ruled with dominion and power and authority who used crosses to control the masses. Caesar was nothing less than a 'son of god,' a deity.

Then comes this poem by the Apostle Paul in Colossians. He had the audacity to say Christ had the authority, not Rome. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, not Caesar. Jesus is Lord, not the throne of Caesar. All thrones and powers and rulers become subject to Christ, not Caesar. Caesar was considered the head of all, but Jesus was supreme.

Just like the view of the earth from the moon was a revolutionary change of perspective, this view of Christ was a revolutionary change of perspective for the people under the dominion of Rome. Then to say, "For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him." Really? The fullness of God? Dwelling inside the skin of a Jewish peasant? This was revolutionary.

These words are familiar to us as followers of Christ. But have you ever thought of the massive importance of them? As we look at pictures of this blue ball on which we ride, the scripture says all things were created in Christ. In Christ, all things hold together. Our earth is held together, stays in place in that inky blackness by the One through whom all things have been created.

Just as those astronauts were trying to describe the awesomeness of seeing the earth rise over the moon – struggling to find the words - the Apostle Paul tries to describe the supremacy of Christ – again, words being so inadequate. So much so, he had to do it in poetry.

It reminds me of a scene from one of my favorite movies, *Contact*, with Jody Foster. The character played by Jody Foster is sent on a mission in space to meet some aliens who have contacted earth. As she nears her destination, space suddenly bursts forth in dramatic colors and beauty. As she views it in awe and wonder, she realizes she doesn't have the words to describe it, and says, " They should have sent a poet."

Thus as the astronauts looked at the earth and tried to find the words to describe it, they thought of home and family, bringing that awesome sight down to their own level, something more comprehensible. In the same manner, Paul takes the supremacy of Christ and brings it down to our level – and makes it about us, what it means for us.

One person (Scott Hoezee) reworded our Colossians passage this way: “Jesus was the One who, when the Big Bang flashed, blew out the match with which he had lit the fire. He’s the One who, as that galactic soup expanded, cooled and slowly gelled into stars and planets ... was cruising over top of that spectacle, shaping and molding it according to his and his Father’s and his Holy Spirit’s designs. And so although he was born one night and laid in a manger, he is also the One who, a few billion or so years before that night, created the atoms that made up the wood of that manger. And now through his resurrection, he is preserving every creature in whose creation he took such delight at the dawn of time.”

This One, the Only One, who is in all and above all and through all and before all things....cares about you. This is the sheer grandeur of the Gospel. After describing the magnificence and awesomeness of Christ, Paul then says Christ came to earth to reconcile all things to himself by the cross. In other words, so you might know this One whom “nothing-greater-can-be-thought.” (Anselm)

I am glad this passage is in scripture because often we view God from the bottom up. We start with our own experiences and then determine from that experience who God is and what God is like. We say things like, “People don’t love me, so how can God love me.” What we are doing is creating God in our own image. What we should do is start from the top – thoughts about God who is not like us – and then work our way down to us.

So, this One who is transcendent and incomprehensible, is intimately present.

This One who never changes, changes us.

This One who is never new and never old, creates and renews us.

This One who is never in need of nurture, nurtures us.

This One who is not like us, loves us.

Therefore, our passage says we have hope.

Christ's role in creation is a comfort, because it assures us that there is no place in the universe that is outside of the loving embrace of the Creator Christ because of Who Christ is.

- In places that are distant from family and friends, Christ is there, because all things have been created by Christ.

- In situations that feel hopeless and God-forsaken, Christ is there, because Christ is before all things.

- In times of pain and suffering, Christ is there, because Christ holds all things together.

- In valleys of deep darkness, Christ is there, because Christ has all authority.

Thus, Paul says, continue in your faith, stand firm and established in it. "Do not move from the hope held out in the gospel."

We are no longer distant from God, but brought into the love of God. And, not only to know the love of God, but to be made holy. Did you catch that? You are reconciled so that you will be "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

Therefore he deserves our praise for what He has done. This means that Christ is not someone we add onto our day. It means we start with Christ. We glorify and thank the Lord in everything, and yet, live in relationship with Him. We trust him as our Savior. We serve Him by making Jesus the top priority of every aspect of our lives.

And not only has Christ made us holy, this Christ that as described is also the head of the church. We, the church, this little gathering of God's people are the very substance of the person of Christ. In a sense, Christ has infused his people, and therefore, we are called the Body of Christ. And therefore, our message is Jesus Christ. It's all about Christ.

We don't ask Him to become part of our agenda. Christ is the agenda. We join His life and adventure. It's not about us: it's about Christ.

Therefore, may we never walk away from the hope of the Gospel. May it always be before us, encouraging us in the uncertainties of life. This One who is above all things and is before all things and holds all things together, is with us. Now that's a hope worth living for and hanging onto. Amen.

(Walk over to the communion table) Having heard this good news, let us turn to God in prayer. Pray with me as I pray for you this morning.

Prayers of the People/The Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, we pray to you, who created all things in heaven and on earth. You know our needs and the needs of the world, and you reach out with love and forgiveness to reconcile all things to yourself.

We pray for the church throughout the world. Forgive us for the divisions that separate us and heal the wounds that those divisions have caused.

We pray that the church, Christ's body, will be united and strengthened by Christ who holds all things together and has first place in everything.

We pray for all who hold the power and responsibility that comes with authority. We pray that the spirit of Christ the King will teach them humility and a willingness to stand alongside those who depend on them for leadership.

We pray for all who suffer pain and mental distress through illness or through the cruelty of others. We pray that Your power and spirit will strengthen them, and bring them the healing and peace that belong to Christ's kingdom.

Grant us hearts filled with wonder, that we may sense the promise in this blue-green planet and feel convinced that our role is to care for it; and likewise that we may share the wonder of Christ who is before all things, and in whom all things hold together.

In the name of this very one, Jesus the Redeemer, we pray together saying....Our Father.....Amen

Introduction to *My Hope is Built On Nothing Less*

Before the historic flight of Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong's brother asked him, "What single thing do you have the most uncertainty about?"

His reply: "How deep is the dust?"

It was a real worry for everyone connected with the Apollo 11 mission, but especially for this man who was going to step out onto the Sea of Tranquility. Scientists knew the moon's surface was covered in powdery gray dust, but they didn't know for sure how deep it was. When the Apollo lander touched down without sinking in, everyone at Mission Control heaved a sigh of relief — but no one more than Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin themselves. Their lives depended upon the depth of that dust.

As we sing "My Hope is Built On Nothing Less," we sing about Christ our Solid Rock. Everything else is sinking sand. Please stand if you are able, and let us sing.