

Stay on the Map.
11/2/2018

OT Psalm 32/Jeremiah 31: 31-34
NT Colossians 1:15-29
Gospel Mark 2:1-12
Rev Graham O'Brien

Introduction.

Last year my wife Lee-ann and I were fortunate to travel to New Delhi, India, where Lee-ann attended a conference. Of course it was only fair that I carried the bags. While in India we visited the city of Agra and the famous Taj Mahal. Entering the gate you see the full



vista of this beautiful building – it is truly breathtaking. And the closer you get the more magnificent it becomes.



And finally when you get up close you see the intricacy of the



craftmanship to build this object of love and devotion. Imagine how you would feel if someone had built this for you?

Our reading from Colossians 2 is a bit like this view of the Taj Mahal. So let's start with the big picture and listen to what these events meant to the early church and how they came to see Jesus: [read from NLT Col 1:15-20]

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ 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

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, ¹⁶ for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

<p>been created through him and for him.</p>	<p>He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.</p> <p>Everything was created through him and for him.</p>
<p>¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ 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.</p>	<p>¹⁷ He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.</p> <p>¹⁸ Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.</p>
<p>¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to</p>	<p>¹⁹ For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰ and through him God</p>

<p>reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.</p> <p>NRSV</p>	<p>reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.</p> <p>NLT</p>
--	---

These words give us the grand view - the full scope of the centrality and the Supremacy of Jesus Christ which is truly cosmic in scale. This is a hymn of praise sung by the early church some 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, a song about the Jesus of eternity and His role in creation. We could say so much about these verses, but I want to quickly identify 3 key points.

1. First, we get one of the most direct references to the divinity of Jesus. Jesus is the "visible image of the invisible God" (vs 15) and "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ" (vs 19). Jesus is

the one in whom the invisible nature and character of God is made visible.

With Jesus we find ourselves looking at the true God, the God of utter self-giving love. And “when you realize that Jesus reveals who God is, gratitude is the first and most appropriate reaction” (NT Wright – Paul for Everyone).

2. Jesus Christ is the identified as the central figure in creation, existing before creation itself, so that “all things” (1:16x2) meaning the whole of creation is understood to be created “in him”, “through him” and “for him” (vs16). And so, in confidence the Colossians and ourselves can know that Jesus rules over everything, the earthly and the heavenly, the physical and the spiritual.
3. Because, all is created by and for Jesus, this creation is of immense worth to God. But we all know that this world falls short of God’s true intention. The answer to this problem is that Jesus

through whom all was made, is also the Jesus through whom all has been made right with God (1:20). Jesus died for you, for me, for the whole of creation itself. And the sign of this new life in this new creation, is the Church (vs 18).

YOU ARE HERE



There is so much more that could be said about these 5 verses, which Bishop Tom Wright described as a road map of the cosmos (verses 15-20). But today I want to focus on the last 3 verses, (verses 21-23) which Wright describes as the arrow indicating “You are here”. It’s like going to a Mall or the Zoo and you look at the map to see the star that tells you where you are, but you do this so that you know which way to go.

Read Colossians 1:21-22

²¹This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²²Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

NLT

As Paul reminds us, it was not long ago that the Colossians were not even on the map – their false worship and behaviour excluded them. The same could be said for us!

I find it amazing when verses you have read many times before, come alive – when you feel that God is speaking directly to you. This is how I felt reading these words last year.

I'm sure for all of us there are aspects of our lives we are not happy with – Paul talks about “evil thoughts and

actions” which is a pretty broad category. Just imagine if our deepest thoughts and feelings were displayed on a TV attached to our heads - we would be horrified.

These are the things that make us doubt – how can God love me! Even Paul felt this way, when he said in Romans 7:15, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (NRSV).

Because of Jesus everything has changed – we are now on the map, on the journey of faith and brought into God's presence. The imagery here is of a royal palace or temple; the Colossians and us are outside the walls, but through the death of King Jesus, we have been made right with God and brought inside. The reality is that we have been made right with God through Jesus.

By placing our faith in Jesus and what he has done for us, he has made us “holy and blameless

as you stand before him without a single fault” (1:22). The things we don’t like in ourselves, the things we do but we don’t want to – these do not take away from the fact that in Jesus we are holy and blameless. As Paul says in Romans 8:1, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”. This is good news, this is what we mean by the word GRACE. Just pause for a moment and let that sink in (you might like to close your eyes and say “holy and blameless” to yourself).

If you think back to our Gospel reading from Mark 2:1-12, we can see that this GRACE is what the life and deeds of Jesus was all about. In this amazing scene, 4 men lower another paralyzed man through a hole in the roof right to the feet of Jesus. And what does Jesus say, “My child, your sins are forgiven”. Then to prove the point Jesus tells him to, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home”. Through faith this man was made “holy and blameless”.

Sometimes we just need to hear that goodnews afresh. But there is something we must do with it. We are

invited to come as we are but challenged to not stay that way. Just like the man was asked by Jesus to pick up his mat and walk home.

Read Colossians 1:23

²³ But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God’s servant to proclaim it.

NLT

Paul says – we must keep believing this truth, standing firmly in it, don’t drift away from our assurance. In Jesus we are forgiven and have been made holy and blameless in God’s sight – hold onto that – because as I’m sure you know the world and even our own thoughts and feelings can easily tell us otherwise. We are on the map, so stay on it and journey forward following Jesus.

Conclusion.

As Paul reminded the Colossians through a song – Jesus is the fullness of God. God is not far off and distant but has a real face in the person of Jesus and offers us real hope through his death and resurrection. And when we realize who Jesus is, when we realize that by looking at Jesus we truly see God, we become determined not to neglect this relationship, and our thanks and praise follows. But times of struggle and doubt are natural, but hold onto the fact that through Jesus, we have been made holy and blameless. And let this transform who we are into the likeness of Jesus, just as in Jesus we see the fullness of God.