

Who I am

21 7 13

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern
both our hearts and bodies
in the ways of your laws
and the works of your commandments;
that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,
we may be preserved in body and soul.

Our text may be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 1 and verse 15:

'He is the image of the invisible God.'

At the crossroads of Jesus' ministry – which Mark places halfway through his gospel while Luke locates it earlier and Matthew later – Jesus asks his disciples the big question – two in fact: **'Who do people say I am ?'** (Mark 8 v27) and **'Who do you say that I am ?'** (v29)

The question who exactly and what exactly Jesus is, is at the heart of the gospel and at the heart of our understanding of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour. I guess to understand fully what that truly means is the fruit of a lifetime's reflection and then, perhaps, only after our resurrection from the dead will we truly fully know the answer.

Peter knew and our patron saint, Bartholomew, knew and so did Thomas when he touched Jesus' wounds on a Sunday evening eight days after the resurrection. And here in the first third of today's reading from his letter to Colossians, Paul gives us his considered opinion of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God.

Now let me apologise that what I'm about to say will fail to do the passage justice – it really requires you to go home and reflect over time about the insights Paul is sharing with us today. A sermon is not a Bible study nor would one Bible study be sufficient to mine the treasures contained in these six verses. Instead, let me identify, point out, something of what Paul understands Jesus to be.

First and foremost, Paul sees Jesus is the image of God, making visible what we cannot see with our own eyes. God by definition is spirit and no human has ever seen him, though God may have walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening speaking with Adam and Eve; he may have talked with Moses and passed close by Elijah; but still no mortal could ever look God in the face and live. But in Jesus, we too who have been created in the image of God are enabled to see something of the true nature of God in and through the person of his Son Jesus Christ, not least God's unequivocal, inexhaustible love for us embodied in Jesus' death on the cross for our sake and for our salvation.

Secondly, Jesus is the instrument and means of God's creative act. Jesus, the Word of God, is the word of power, spoken to bring the universe into being. In the beginning was the Word and Jesus is the source and sustainer of all being.

Which brings me to my third point – that Jesus is the head of all, the most important being in the universe. All things come from him and all things are sustained in him. Christ is our head, our supreme ruler and governor, the Lord of all.

My penultimate point is that Jesus is the first-born from the dead. Not only did Christ die but he now still lives, having been raised from the dead on the third day. The fact of the resurrection means that we, like Paul, can claim that death has lost its sting. Die we all must but death is not the end for us. We have the promise and the hope of eternal life – and that, my friend, is priceless !

And lastly, my fifth and final point is that through Christ we are reconciled to God. Religion, any religion, and Christianity is no exception, is about binding Man back to God. Religion is about bridging the gap between God and Man. What Christ does through the cross is give us the way back to God. Christ, the Word of God, is the story that tells us how to get back to God by following the path which is Jesus Christ.

So, this morning, may I encourage you to do two things. First, to reflect on whom you think Jesus Christ is and what that means for you. Second, to go away and to read these six verses, verses 15 – 20, from the opening chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, and to unpack some of the truths that Paul wants to share with us. Tom Wright in his translation renders these verses as a poem: the truth that these verses contain is a hymn about the love of God for us expressed through his Son.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 28 : Who I am

