

I am. A sermon preached on January 24, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC. by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: EXODUS 3:1-14
COLOSSIANS 1:15-20
JOHN 8:48-59

Each of this morning's scripture readings speak of the holy otherness of God – something beyond our immediate perception

Yet,

They also speak of God's personal involvement of his people – us.

The reading from Exodus is the well-known calling of Moses to

*Go down Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.*

The mountain, Moses, the burning bush not consumed by the flames, the impossible dream, The destination – all high drama!

From Colossians – words by which Paul describes Jesus and his importance for all people and for all time.

Then this week's I AM – Bound up with a heightened sense of their own importance, the Pharisees enter into a verbal

bantering with Jesus to see if they can trip Jesus up.

See how long it takes before they can say about Jesus 'gotcha'

Of course, Jesus more than holds his own with these religious leaders

In fact, he caps off his responses with a very firm no wiggle room I AM

One that so incenses the group that they want to throw stones at Jesus.

Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am

A claim that reminds us very clearly that Jesus is not just some holy man of 1st century Palestine.

Rather, Jesus' purpose, plan, existence is linked to the whole of God's relationship with his people, from way before Father Abraham!

What does such a claim, declaration; I AM mean to us today?

I suggest one way to answer that question is to highlight,

Lift up if you will this morning's reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians

For here in responding to a specific situation in Colossae,

Paul gives God's people some timeless words about who is Jesus that relate to this morning's I AM

He is the image of the invisible God (vs. 15a)

Right off Paul declares something magnificent
 Jesus is the image – Jesus is the representation of
 the invisible God.

There is no doubt that in Jesus, we see God
 Where once God had only been seen and known
 in clouds, voices and shadows,
 He is now known in the person and ministry of
 Jesus Christ.

Jesus – the *visible image of the invisible God*
 He both represents and shows God to the world.

To us – this phrase alone means that *God is*
not distant. God is not impersonal
But He is God with us
Emmanuel

And not with us as some cosmic force or essence,
 but as a person we can know

One with whom we can relate – owing to his
 humanity

The Father has shown himself through his son.
 Isn't that awesome!!!

In Jesus we can know God

In his great mercy, God has come to us to be known
through his son Jesus

Just consider that for a moment.

The first born of all creation (vs.15b)

Jesus holds a position of honour and authority
 over the whole of creation.

**For in him all things in heaven and on earth
were created, things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers of
powers (vs. 16)**

Jesus is not just a good man.

Jesus is intimately and intricately involved in the creation of all things.

Those things we can see and those things we cannot

He is not only in charge of the spiritual world
The Colossians had developed a bad habit of giving undue prominence to angels.

Here Paul quickly puts EVERYTHING under the rule of Christ.

Jesus has no rival – in this world or the invisible world around us.

Worldly thrones, dominions, rulers or powers – they are not greater than Jesus – as much as either they or we who are caught up in their power would like to think they are.

Remember again that meeting between Jesus and Pilate.

The representation of Roman military power – Pilate-saying that it is up to him whether Jesus lives or dies

Jesus' response

⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have

power to release you, and power to crucify you?' ¹¹ Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above ;(John 19:10-11)

Take that the Donald Trumps, Vladimir Putins and others who believe they are not answerable to an authority greater than themselves!

There is no created power who will tell Jesus what to do!

Does not such a declaration here in Colossians 1 give greater comfort and authority to Paul's words in Romans 8?

Paul himself lived under the same Roman military occupation as did Jesus

Yet, in his most carefully thought through letter (Romans) he is able to unequivocally declare

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If

God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for

all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who

justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. [A] ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love

of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing has changed

Ultimately, Jesus *has no rivals – in this world or in the unseen world*

All things have been created through him and for him (vs.16b)

ALL creation finds its purpose in Jesus.

There is no division between sacred and secular.

Everything is for Jesus – everything.

Song writer, Robin Mark has captured this truth so evocatively in his Jesus, all for Jesus

Jesus, all for Jesus

All I am and have and ever hope to be

Jesus, all for Jesus

All I am and have and ever hope to be

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans

**I surrender these into Your hands
 All of my ambitions, hopes and plans
 I surrender these into Your hands**

**For it's only in Your will that I am free
 For it's only in Your will that I am free
 Jesus, all for Jesus
 All I am and have and ever hope to be**

Daily – we are not simply biding our time, but serving the Lord
 Whether we are consciously thinking about him or singing to Him or not,
 When we do the work that he has set before us – including house cleaning, serving clients changing diapers, teaching students waiting tables – all if it is for Jesus and is done in service to him.

He himself is before all thing and in him all things hold together (vs 17)

Literally, Jesus keeps things from going “poof”! Things are held together from spiraling into nothingness and cosmic chaos by Jesus says Paul.

I know all too well that at times that is really hard to see and believe that Jesus/God is really in control
 Terror from groups like ISIS

Gun violence like that in La Roche, SK yesterday and Sandy Hook and a host of other places seems to only confirm that no one is in control.

This plus the worries, anxieties and fears that so many of us have about so many things seems to overwhelm and paralyze.

Yet here in Colossians and for all time, Jesus declares that Jesus holds all things together.

The forces of darkness, in whatever form they take have no power over him

Jesus sustains and holds this world together guiding it ever toward him and his salvation

Remember Jesus perspective giving words to his disciples about evil and its supposed power to overrule Jesus.

From Peterson's The message

In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've [Jesus] conquered the world (Jn 16:33)

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. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (vs 18-19)

Here Paul is addressing a specific issue in Colossae.

The Colossian Christians had lost that perspective of Jesus at the centre.

As a result they were experimenting with all sorts of false doctrine and rationalizing what was clearly sinful behavior

A problem specific only to first century Colossae? Don't you every believe it.

Power and authority in any community of faith can so easily be misused or twisted in such a way that though the community says Jesus is centre – He's not even on the stage!!!

I have known situations and so no doubt have you where Jesus was pushed aside as centre and programs, rules, people, buildings and leaders became entrenched in a place that can only be occupied by Jesus.

The end result in every case is that the community either calcifies or dies! They become as one highland scot once said to me about a church – they're deed, but they donna know they're deed!!

No church, no community of faith exists for its own purposes, but for Jesus's purpose and will and for the Father's glory!!

and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (vs 20

Paul's summary here of the work of Jesus.

We do not get closer to God through the observance of rules and regulations – however good they may be for us.

We draw closer to God and Jesus as we respond to what God has already done for us in Jesus.

We draw closer to God and Jesus by building on a relationship with him.

It's an ongoing relationship that you will spend a lifetime developing and building

All of this which Paul sets out in Colossians 1 would just be so much chitty chat, or words, words, words,

Were it not for this morning's declaratory promise and affirmation

Before Abraham was, I am...

The work of God and Jesus began long before the measurement of time as we know it – chronos – years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes..

The work of God and Jesus continues today through the lives and work of God's people – you and I

The work of God and Jesus will continue until Jesus returns...

That's Kairos – God's time-- and it is not measured by our definitions of time!!!

The call and the challenge are to acknowledge this is so and to daily live in the light of this mystery and magnificence.

And not just live, but to frequently in our lives find ourselves more often than not to be 'lost in wonder, love and praise.

AMEN