

Cell notes 21.7.19 The Supremacy of Christ

Reading: Colossians 1:15-28

The history lesson in belief, of the stained glass window at Holy Trinity

- At the top we see Christ: crowned and robed in majesty, in his left hand he holds an orb signifying his rule over the world; his right hand is raised in blessing. If we were Eastern Orthodox Christians we would immediately recognise this as a variant of the way of visualising Christ, known as '*Christ Pantocractor*' (Christ Almighty).
- In the medieval Western Church this way of portraying Christ became known as 'Christ in Majesty'.
- This reminds us of what Allan said two weeks ago about how we are a community with 'treasures old & new'.

"You have won, O Galilean"

- In the fourth decade of the first century AD, a small but expanding sect within the Jewish community began to proclaim a very controversial and astonishing new set of beliefs.
- Over the next sixty years this sect would expand out of its heartland within the Jewish community, as large numbers of gentile Greek-speakers joined it.
- Within three hundred years this sect had become the official religion of the whole Roman Empire. As the pagan Roman Emperor Julian II, 'the Apostate', was alleged to have said: *"You have won, O Galilean"*.

The evidence from Colossians

- *"the image of the invisible God"*: We are certain – just like those 1st century followers – that the Jewish preacher and teacher Jesus (*Yeshua*, as they would have known him) was nothing less than God revealed in human form.
- *"the firstborn of all creation"* : read in context (crucial this) it means that Jesus was not created. It means that Jesus always stood in relationship to God his Father as his Son, and not as a created being, however exalted. Clearly, Paul had this in mind, as in verse 17 he declares of Christ that: *"He himself is before all things."*
- Paul went on to say that *"in him"* (or *"by him"*) everything in heaven and earth was created (verse 16).
- All of creation only holds together because of him (verse 17), and *"in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"* (verse 19) and through Christ's sacrifice on the cross peace was made with God (verse 20).
- The God, through whom the created order came into being, willingly went to a Roman gibbet to save the creation that was, and is, and always will be, so loved by God!

The implications of Colossians...

(1) Christ loves his creation & compels us to do likewise. Care for creation is not a fringe activity or an option; it should be hard-wired into Christian behaviour.

(2) Christ died for all people & compels us to be channels of his love to others. In the week of 'send them back', in a world of rising racial and nationalist tension, the Good News of Christ is for all, regardless of ethnicity.

(3) Christ knows what it is like to be a human being.

(4) Christ is now seated at the right hand of God the Father: Christ has put us right with God and what separated us from God is gone; we have direct access to God; the power of God flows to and through us.

Applying the scripture:

1. What strikes you most about this passage?
2. How would you explain that Christ is "*the image of the invisible God*" in your own words?
3. Why is this such a crucial Christian belief?
4. Why would (a) many Jews & also (b) many pagan Romans and Greeks in the 1st century have been so shocked about what this passage says about Christ?
5. Which of the 4 'Implications of Colossians' do you find (a) most encouraging & (b) most challenging? Take these thoughts into prayer.