

“The Cosmic Christ”

Sunday, July 17, 2016

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

 (Colossians 1:15-28, NRSV)

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

“*Cosmos*” – in 1980, Carl Sagan introduced us to the mysteries of the universe in this award-winning PBS special.

In 2014, Neil deGrasse Tyson continued this exploration on FOX Television and the National Geographic Channel.

The Cosmos seems to fascinate us, even though we know so little about it really.

This fascination has led humans to spend billions of dollars and countless hours of research in science and technology to try to discover the origins of the universe.

This word “*cosmos*” is simple; it means the universe seen as a well-ordered whole.

“*Cosmology*” is the science that studies the origin and development of the universe.

This morning’s message is titled: “**The Cosmic Christ**” and it depends on us understanding that the word “*cosmic*” means: *of or relating to the universe, especially as distinct from Earth.*

The Cosmic Christ can be defined as that aspect of God which pervades all of Creation.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes Christ as the one “who fills the universe in all its parts” (Ephesians 1:23).

Let us pray...Lord, open our hearts and minds today to listen to your Word. Guide us to a deeper understanding, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

There is some debate about the true authorship and origin of the letter to the Colossians.

Setting that debate aside, this letter is remarkable for its expression of a very high Christology.

Particularly in verses 15-20, we hear what sounds like a hymn being sung to the Christ who is the *“image of the invisible God.”*

What this really means to us is that it presents a vision of who Jesus is as God and what his relationship is with all of Creation.

This is about understanding how important Jesus is for all of us.

First we hear the claim that Christ is ***“the image of the invisible God and firstborn of all Creation.”***

This is a radical claim then and now.

- Jesus is the only one ever with this status;
- The humanity of the earthly Jesus in inextricably linked to this pre-existent and cosmic Christ;
- Redemption and the life of the church originate in this same cosmic Christ.

☞ Then the hymn continues with talk of thrones, dominions, rulers, and power.

We face a real challenge understanding “thrones”.

Aside from “*Game of Thrones*” on HBO, we have no real experience to draw from.

Presumably, according to the text, they are created by Christ thereby they are intended to be good.

Yet we see them time and again in opposition to God – What happened?

Scripture tells us that God anointed human leaders all the time: prophets, priests, judges, and kings were chosen by God to lead the people.

This process stands as the basis for the concept of “*the divine right of kings.*”

Of course, the divine right of kings fell out of favor when people began to realize that the kings were using it as an excuse for bad behavior with impunity.

People learned that “*power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*”

This was not God’s intention for creating “thrones or dominions or rulers or powers.”

We may think that this no longer affects us in our democratic society.

However, there are all sorts of “*dominions and powers*”, even today, that divide our allegiance from the principles of Christ.

- Civil government may be at odds sometimes with Jesus’ mandates to love our enemies, care for those in prison, and shelter the homeless.
- Immigration policies may ignore God’s call for hospitality to strangers in a strange land. (Hebrews 13:2 – “*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*”)
- Over-paid lobbyists may seek to hinder us from being good stewards of the world God has entrusted to us.

There are indeed many powers that threaten to take our attention away from God’s commands.

☞ There are other dominions and powers at work in the world that can also make us slaves.

Most prevalent, it seems, are addictions to many different things.

Addiction of any kind holds our focus and prevents us from seeing the Jesus who loves us.

Drugs, alcohol, and pornography are the things most people think of when you mention “addiction.”

But, think about the realities of other addictions, such as:

- Social media...
- Violent images...
- Celebrity news/status...
- Success/wealth/luxury...
- Self-image...

These and many other things engender addictive behavior that is destructive to our bodies and our souls.

👉 Another temptation that threatens the church is when we try to make the Christian faith “**believable**”.

(This is not the same as making Jesus “*relevant*”; Jesus does that all by himself.)

For more than 2,000 years, Christians have faced the challenge of delivering Jesus' message to a hostile world.

Think about it – Jesus expects a lot from his followers; the other “*gods*” don't.

People want the most they can get for the least amount of effort.

In a pluralistic world with many “gods” and causes, the temptation is to pull back on the “high Christology”.

Let's make Jesus a little less than he is – not quite so demanding – so he won't disturb or upset people.

The church has been fighting institutional decline for decades by making it easier and easier to join up – by expecting less and less from its members.

It's not a tactic that's worked out either; people don't expect much from an institution that doesn't expect much from them.

Remember in school, when it came to getting your fine arts requirement, there was this class called **ART APPRECIATION**.

It was for those of us, who could not paint, or draw, or anything that took some artistic talent.

We were expected to show up to class and learn to appreciate art by looking at pictures and listening to boring lectures about art history.

Recently I heard about a Sunday school curriculum that includes a chapter designed to help students **“appreciate Jesus”** – *Really?!*

Is that what church has come to? – Just show up and look at the pictures?

The dominions and powers of this world have us right where they want us: **watered down and harmless.**

 **But wait! There’s Good News!**

That’s what the rest of this passage is about.

After the hymn praising Christ is sung, the letter goes on to tell us what all this “high

Christology” has to do with weak and sinful people like us.

So, if everything in the hymn, the first 5 verses of this reading, is true...

- Jesus IS the image of the invisible God;
- Everything in the universe WAS created through Him;
- All the promises of Scripture ARE fulfilled in Him;
- If Jesus really IS the firstborn of all Creation and all these earthly powers WERE created by Him...

THEN...

- All those same powers have been “dethroned” by the cross;
- Like us, those evils have been redeemed;
- They no longer have the power to enslave us because, through Jesus, we have the power to push back and free ourselves.

Listen to verses 21-23 again:

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil

behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.”

Jesus has redeemed and reconciled us; making it possible for us to face whatever the dominions and powers of this world throw at us.

Provided that you: *continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”*

☞ So, this Cosmic Christ does not just “reign on high, in heavens above”; he is the head of the church, taking power away from this world.

We are all one within the church because we have one head and we are part of the Body.

The thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers of this world have many names and wear many masks.

There is only one who holds the Name of Jesus.

We are invited to sing this song of praise, not just in worship, but also when we work and serve and play in the world.

Sing of the firstborn every day.

With our singing comes the expectation of our following; we are not here just to show up, sing the song, and look at the pictures.

We are called to represent the Cosmic Christ to the world.

The Cosmic Christ can be defined as that aspect of God which pervades all of Creation.

If that is true, then every being somehow carries a bit of the divine.

If that is true, then **every being**, *all of Creation*, is **SACRED**.

This redemptive truth **must** have an impact on how we behave and how we treat one another.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**