

A GLIMPSE THROUGH THE TREES  
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First Presbyterian Church  
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Colossians 1:11-20

A while back I was hiking in the North Carolina mountains with friends. It is, as many of you know, a wonderful part of the world for hiking. This was a beautiful day, and we had a good time hiking through the woods. Because it is the Southern Appalachians, you never get above the tree line. We were not above the trees, but among them. We saw majestic trees and smaller undergrowth, and even individual wildflowers by the side of the path.

But then, after several hours of hiking, we came to a clearing in the trees, and we could see! We could see where we had come from, how high up we had climbed. We could see where we were going. It was a glorious, majestic view, and for those few moments we had a complete view of this beautiful land through which we walked. And then it was time to start out again, and within a few steps we were again deep in the woods, the great view just a memory.

This day, this day of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the Christian year, is something like that hike. Each Sunday we gather in this place, and we consider various parts of our faith and the Lord whom we worship—this text of scripture, this call of Christ, this way we are to live. It is like looking close up at the individual trees of faith.

But not today. Today we have a glimpse through the trees, and for this one day we stand in the clearing where we can see the entire journey—where we have come from, how high we have climbed, and where we are going. On this day we see the glorious majesty of Jesus Christ from start to finish. Jesus is Lord of all our days, of all our journeys.

Just how majestic is this Christlike view that we have on this day? Let this scripture from the little book of Colossians tell us about Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God.

He is the firstborn of all creation.

In him all things in heaven and on earth were created . . . all things were created through him and for him.

In him all things hold together.

And if that's not enough, consider:

He is the head of the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.

Wow! That is a majestic, gigantic, immense claim. Jesus Christ is the key to all reality. One writer, trying to find something to say about this passage, sold it short by saying: "They fact that they could make such a statement shows what a tremendous impression Jesus had made on them."<sup>1</sup> But this scripture is about a lot more than making a tremendous impression. Mother Theresa makes a tremendous impression. The Dalai Lama makes a tremendous impression. Jesus Christ, by contrast, is the key to all reality.

One of our church confessions takes a stab at it: "God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces all of our life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate."<sup>2</sup> True as far as it goes. But, you see, the significance of Jesus Christ is really more than that. Everything we see with our eyes and hear with our ears and touch and feel and taste, every event, everything in creation, the things that have happened and are happening now and will happen in the future, the times of great joy and the ties of enormous grief—all find their meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ. That is what these little verses claim.

When you think about it, it is an enormous claim. Here was this little group of believers, just a generation or so after Jesus had lived on earth, making these claims for him. I can't imagine that today we would make similar claims for someone who had lived, say, a half-century ago: Ronald Reagan is the image of the invisible God. Martin Luther King is the firstborn of all creation. In Elvis all things hold together. It just doesn't work.

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<sup>1</sup> G. P. H. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*. The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> The Confession of 1967 *The Book of Confessions*. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996) Section 9.53.

But these folks were convinced that in Jesus of Nazareth, they had seen a glimpse of reality that encompassed everything. The word “all” occurs in this passage 10 times: all things on heaven and earth, all things, all the fullness of God—all, all, all have their meaning and fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

What these little verses invite us to do, then, is to take anything in your life, take everything in your life and in our world, and draw a line from that to Jesus.

You ride along in your car and see some sheep grazing in the field, and you think of the one who said: “I am the Good Shepherd.”

You look at the panoply of stars in the sky on a brilliant clear night, and you think: “All things were created in him.”

You see a homeless child on TV and you feel, not just pity, but you remember the one who said: “Suffer the little children to come unto me.”

You see images of warfare, too many images in too many places, and instantly comes to mind the Prince of Peace.

You take a trip to the grocery store, and you breathe a prayer of thanksgiving for food, and for the one who cared enough for hunger to feed a multitude.

You go to the cancer ward, and know that Jesus who suffered and died is there ahead of you.

You go to the funeral home, consumed with grief, and sense the presence of the one who said: “I will not fail you nor forsake you.”

You watch politicians jockeying for position to be the next president, and you recall that all nations and powers and authorities find their meaning in Christ our Lord.

You go to the party on Saturday night, and recall how he enjoyed and was criticized for being one who loved food and drink, who even partied with the riff-raff from the other side of town.

You see trash by the side of the road, and it grieves you because in Jesus all things were created—it’s his world.

And it's not just that. When those terrible things happen that cause us to ask Why, when the devastation hits Bangladesh or the war continues in Iraq, when personal tragedies absolutely knock the props out from under us, still we say: Jesus. I don't mean to give that as an easy or flip answer to your times of enormous pain. But whatever comes our way, good and bad, we are invited by these words to find meaning and purpose and direction by looking to Jesus, who suffered as one of us, who hurt like we hurt, who died on the cross for us, so that no power on earth can ever finally hurt us again.

It is as if we were to put on Jesus glasses, so that everywhere you look, everything you do, every memory you have of the past, every hope for the future, is looked at through Jesus. All finds its meaning in him.

We don't make this claim in order to be superior to other people. We don't say that believing in Jesus makes us Number One. In fact, just the opposite. This little passage reminds us: "Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, . . . by making peace through his blood on the cross." Jesus doesn't separate us from others; he reconciles us to others. We all, all belong together, because of Jesus.

I have to confess that I do not completely understand this passage. In fact, I cannot completely understand it. It's too big. I cannot get my head around it. This Jesus is Lord of everything. But most days I'm not thinking about everything. I'm thinking about the next thing, the next phone call, or the upcoming trip to the doctor, or the meeting I'm going to, or the Titans game, or the traffic jam, this joy, that sorrow, this celebration, that grief. Like my hiking trip, I'm looking not at the whole forest, but at one individual tree. This passage reminds us that whatever comes, whatever we deal with today and tomorrow and all the days that are ours, that life's meaning is to be found in the Christ who lived among us as Jesus of Nazareth.

Just for today, we've had a glimpse through the trees. We've seen where we've come and where we're going. We've been reminded again who we are and whose we are. Jesus Christ is Lord. Lord at the beginning, Lord at the end. Even now he is Lord—Lord of all, all, all. Thanks be to God.✠