

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship we come before God in prayer, let us pray:

Loving God we come to worship You this morning, as we gather help us to see all that You have given us, all that we have that will help us to show those we know that You are at work in the world. Amen.

Hymn CH4 129 – The Lord is King! Lift up your voice!

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Omnipresent God with a sense of awe and wonder we come into Your presence. You created us and You know us well, what gifts we have, the potential there is in each one of us.

While we were in our mother's womb each a unique being knitted together by Your love the capacity for living in community, serving others helping them and ourselves to know You was grown there also.

You are rightly due our deep gratitude and thanks. And we are thankful God for all that You give us. The ability to make friendship, to laugh and sing, to eat and drink and be with others sharing together learning from each other, supporting each other.

For all the groups that we are part of we thank You, for this group of faithful people with whom we worship we thank You.

When we take what we have for granted, God forgive us. When we are ungrateful for what we have wanting more, God forgive us.

When we think that the talents and gifts You have given us are simply for our own use, God forgive us.

Enable us, no matter how shy we might be, no matter how scared we might be to trust in You, to follow You, to do what You ask so that all may come to know that 'You are God'.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Reading: Colossians 1: 15 - 23 (taken from The Good News Translation)

The Person and Work of Christ

¹⁵ Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things. ¹⁶ For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him. ¹⁷ Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place. ¹⁸ He is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body's life. He is the first-born Son, who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have the first place in all things.

¹⁹ For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. ²⁰ Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.

²¹ At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought. ²² But now, by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his presence. ²³ You must, of course, continue faithful on a firm and sure foundation, and must not allow yourselves to be shaken from the hope you gained when you heard the gospel. It is of this gospel that I, Paul, became a servant—this gospel which has been preached to everybody in the world.

Hymn CH4 437 – He is exalted,

Sermon – 'Holding Together'

I wonder this morning if you have ever heard yourself say these following phrases; 'Isn't he like his dad!' or 'Isn't she like her mum!' 'Look at those eyes, that nose – the

spitting image of his father!’ ‘Look at her chin and her mouth – as beautiful as her mother!’

The similarities between a parent and child can indeed be remarkable, and that usually extends further than physical resemblance. Like it or not, our gestures, mannerisms, temperaments and attitudes all betray our origins, far more than we realise. Not that two people are ever the same, but there can be remarkable likenesses between them.

However great these may be, though, they are nothing compared with the likeness that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Colossians: that between Jesus and God. For, here is a parallel unlike any other, closer and more striking even, than perfectly identical twins. For the Son does not just resemble his Father; He is One with Him, full and completely making him known. To know Jesus is to know God. To look at Jesus’ life is to see God at work. To experience Jesus’ love is to be touched by God’s love in turn. And so it goes on.

This is a startling claim at any level, but altogether more astonishing when we remember that the God we are talking about here is the same God Who, according to the Old Testament, is enthroned in righteousness, mighty in power, greater than the human mind can comprehend and so Holy that nothing impure can stand before Him. A yawning gulf had separated God from humanity, any knowledge of Him partial and once removed.

Yet, suddenly, all is different – for God is made flesh. Sharing our humanity and inviting us to share His life. This is the truth at the heart of the Gospel, the message we celebrate today and should celebrate every day. We are not limited to simply knowing about God; we are invited to know Him for ourselves in a daily relationship with Jesus – who is the spitting image of His Father!

This is the message that Paul is trying to give to the Colossians and here, in our New Testament reading today, Paul tries to do so by effectively writing a poem about Jesus. This is one of the most important passages in the Bible. It is written by someone who has written in this way because he wants his readers to stop and think.

Poetry often does that – make us stop and think. This poetic, hymn-like, confession of faith might even have been used as part of baptismal services in the early Christian Church – because in a few, meaty verses, it encapsulates so much about what we

believe about Jesus. Who He is. What He does. Why He is central to the faith we have.

So, let's take some time today to look at what Paul has written. He tells us that Jesus has made the invisible God – visible. A world that had never seen God, now could, in Jesus, see what God was like. They could see His character. They could see His grace. Jesus was, Jesus is the vision of the gracious, loving, beckoning, creating, redeeming God. God becomes flesh – the fancy word for it is incarnation. God becomes visible in Jesus, so you and I can see what He is like, and Who we are to be like, in the way we try to live our own lives.

In a sense, here we have a little piece of the Christmas story in Paul's writing. What do I mean? Well in Christina Rossetti's poem, we sing; 'Love came down at Christmas' and that is exactly what happened. Humanity – at last – got to see what God was really like.

Paul tells us that Jesus – as part of God – was involved in the poetic mystery of creation. All that is in the world, every aspect of the world, the universe – is shot through with the love and the hope we find in Jesus. Our world, in its very DNA, is upheld and sustained by Jesus. He is the One Who prevents everything from falling into chaos. He is, as Paul writes, the One Who, '*brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.*' It is Jesus that all things hold together.

During the seventeenth century, the poet, John Donne wrote these words:

*'No man is an island entire of itself; every man
Is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...'*

Who we are is largely dependent on those to whom we are connected, and how we are connected to one another. That will start with family and friends. It will spread out into the workplace, the wider community and the Church. In today's world we have learned that decisions we make in this country – like how we spend our money and the products we buy – can have a direct impact on the way people live, thousands of miles away.

None of us is totally separate and independent. All of us are woven together, brought together, and in the Christian sense, held together through Jesus. His concern for us, and His love for us – is for **all** of us, individually and globally. His love is great enough, strong enough to embrace this world, including the little part of it that we inhabit.

And into the great poem of creation and the presence of God and love, and sacrifice, and hope and reconciliation, we are drawn. We are not cast aside because we are broken, or unfit, or old, or young, or stained, or sinful, but called to by God, through Jesus, Who beckons us to come closer. As Paul writes, *'through his Son's blood on the cross'* – in a way we can scarcely imagine, we are brought into a right relationship with God, when we believe.

All of those who did 'evil things' – Paul says – are now drawn closer to God through Jesus, because they have placed their faith in Him. The gulf has been bridged by Jesus. The tear in the fabric of Creation has been mended and in such a way that it is no longer the old thing, but the new thing.

In these few poetic verses every big theme of the Gospel is crammed. Every 'big' word that the grandest theologian has ever used is to be found in some form or other – Creation, Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Redemption, Salvation. There are all found in these few poetic verses in 1st Colossians. They all point to the centrality of Jesus to our faith and our life, They all point to the way in which we Jesus, woven through everything that we are, and everything that our world is.

For there is no aspect of life, no sphere of our daily living, in which Jesus cannot be found. Every contemporary aspiration – respect for individuals, appreciation of property, vitality of family and community in their broadest sense, the ecological order on creation, justice between individuals, groups and nations – it is all here. It is all touched by Jesus. He is holding it all together.

All of this is true, says Paul, if we *'continue faithful...'* Whether or not we choose to be with God, and let Jesus work His work of reconciliation is not automatic. We have to choose. We can accept or reject this loving, beckoning offer from God. The Hope of the Gospel holds so long as the Christian holds on to it. What is called for here is a character transformation in our lives if we enter into a relationship with God.

All those big fancy words - Creation, Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Redemption, Salvation – they mean nothing unless we have let Jesus in and recognise the reality that He holds all things together, with us and for us.

Is your life a little frayed at the edges? Are things not working out the way that you had hoped or planned? Is there trouble or fear? Guilt or anger? Have you thought,

seriously thought, about the place that your faith holds in your life? Not just what you believe, but how you live out what you believe? Is there, perhaps, just a little bit of inspiration for you today, in the poetry of faith, that sweeps through these wonderful themes that are central to Christianity, but at the end of all it all, boil down to this: *'God made peace through his Son ... so brought back to himself all things...'*

When worlds fall apart, and life spins out of control, and chaos has come, return and come back. Come back and hold on to the One who brought everything back and holds it all together today. For here, in this intense poem of belief – we find not only the reason, but also the means to not give up, but instead to keep on trying, to keep on hoping, to keep on living. We find the One who holds everything together – Jesus – and he looks just like His Father.

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

Song for reflection – 'Forever'

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Loving God Your love is there for all who are open to You. We ask that You might motivate us to reach out to those who come into our lives in whatever way so that they might know You, Your love, that they might know that You are God.

Those who have built walls of silence around them because of a hurt, or a wrongdoing, or an action long past. People who have hardened their heart to You believing that they can rely on themselves and who find life is confusing or broken or frightening.

Those known and unknown to us who feel isolated and who want to reach out to You but don't know how to, may they be open to the hospitality of others through which they might come to know You.

We pray for this community of Your people here in Eastwood may we be brave rather than being complacent, may we be bold rather than retiring, may we follow Your call with trusting faith so that Your will may be done and Your kingdom may come.

Jesus Christ who pushed the barriers, who called and continues to call people from what is comfortable, Ruffle our feathers, stir in us a fresh excitement in Your word and

indeed in You so that we might use all that we have been given by You to show all who surround us that You are God. Amen.

Hymn CH4 561 – Blessed assurance,

Benediction

We go now, surrounded by the love of Christ to live, to love and to serve. We go with faithful and humble hearts. As we go now, may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.

Recessional – ‘The Lord bless you and keep you’