

Colossians 1:15-23 CC 10.30am April 14th 2013

I want to speak for a few minutes about Jesus. Now that won't surprise you whether you are a regular here or whether you are here for Thomas' thanksgiving, after all it is what Vicar's do – they talk about Jesus.

This morning we look at Jesus as part of a series of talks here at Christ Church looking at what we believe as Christians about God as Father Son and Holy Spirit and about the church.

Today we consider Jesus. We live in a nation which has benefitted in so many ways from the influence of Jesus and of Christianity over 2000 and yet it is possible for people not really to know Jesus and to miss his massive significance.

I read recently how on December 17th 1903 on a beach in North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright, who until then had been bicycle mechanics, managed the first powered flight in their aeroplane of 59 seconds.

The Wright brothers sent a telegram to their sister in Ohio with the news: 'First sustained flight today for 59 seconds. STOP. Hope to be home for Christmas. STOP.' In her excitement she took the telegram down to the local newspaper and handed it straight to them. The next day the news was splashed across the front page: 'Popular local bicycle merchants home for the holiday.'

An amazing achievement. And yet its significance was completely overlooked when it first happened. Because the Wright brothers were well known in Ohio, the reporters missed what was really newsworthy in the event.

It is possible for something similar to happen with the Christian message. We have some idea of Jesus, some notion of who he was, of what he said but we don't really understand the significance of who he was, what he did and what that means for us.

So let me try and explain that for us this morning.

On Monday I went to a store to buy a box through which to watch TV. I asked one man who put me onto someone else "who really knows about these things". To me it seemed he really did know about them and quite a bit of what he said went either over my head or in one ear and out the other. However, at the end I remembered sufficient to help me make a decision. My hope is that at the end you will be able to remember sufficient if not to make a decision about Jesus then certainly to move you in that direction.

I want to use the passage we had read from the Bible to help us look at three claims that Christians make about Jesus.

1. Jesus is God v15&19

In v15 it says "He (that is Jesus) is the image of the invisible God". Now we might think Paul was saying Jesus is not the real thing in the way that a photograph is an image of someone or something

and not the thing itself. But Paul is not saying that. For him image meant manifestation or representation. So what he was saying is that the immortal invisible God has made himself mortal and visible in Jesus. In case the Colossians didn't get the drift Paul spells out exactly what that meant in v19 "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." All that God is was in Jesus. You have I'm sure heard of Allinson's 'bread wi' nowt taken out'. This is God in human form with nowt taken out. Jesus is fully God.

What Paul was saying was two things. One is that Jesus is God and the other is that God who is Spirit has become flesh that he might be seen and known.

We don't have to try and guess what God is like because in Jesus he has come and shown us.

We are familiar with Rolf Harris and his art and those words "can you tell what it is yet?"

As we look at the Bible we see that kind of progressive revelation or building up a picture as God reveals more and more about himself until finally he reveals all in his Son Jesus, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb 1:1-3)

When one of his disciples asked Jesus to show them God, Jesus reply was "he who has seen me has seen the Father (that is God)" (John 14:9)

So we can know God but to do so we need to go to Jesus and to know Jesus we need to go to the gospel records of his life. The God of the Universe can be known through Jesus Christ - because he was and is God.

2. Jesus is Lord v15-17

The words in our reading ascribe a unique place and authority to Jesus, just look at them with me, "the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

It is a huge statement that Paul was making here. The word "firstborn" can refer either to priority in time or in rank. Perhaps both meanings are to be understood here. Christ is before all creation and supreme over it. He is its Lord. He has authority as we see here over the whole of creation, over thrones and powers and authorities.

As we look at the account of his life we see something of his authority being shown.

We see many occasions where people came to him with different ailments and he healed them. We see him calming a great storm. We see him forgiving sinful people and we see him raising the dead.

In each of these situations he did it by his word. In the same way that creation came about by the word of God so God the Son showed his authority over every aspect of creation by his word.

He still is Lord over the whole of creation, over Kings and rulers and over each one of us.

I'm sure you are aware of the significance of 2nd June 2013. It is 60 years since the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the second. During that coronation the Archbishop of Canterbury gave her an orb under a cross with these words, "Receive this Orb, set under the Cross, and remember that the whole world is subject to the Power and Empire of Christ our Redeemer".

This is Jesus who rules over all and yet whom often we reduce to a swear word.

Here is the Christian claim for Jesus that he is God who rules over everything in creation.

3. Jesus is Saviour v20-23

On Easter Monday I heard that from the beginning of the 2020 football season there will be only one Premier league team in the city of Liverpool because the present two clubs of Liverpool and Everton would be merged to form one club. I pondered this for a while and thought about the huge rivalry between the two and then realised that Easter Monday was April 1st! Of course it is impossible, two groups with such enmity and such a history could never join.

But what Paul talks about in these verses is an even greater enmity that has been overcome. Look at v21 -22 "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death".

What on earth was he on about?

Well Paul was reminding these Christians in Colossae what had happened to them, how God had changed their lives through the message of the death of Jesus Christ.

Paul used the language of alienation, enmity and reconciliation to describe what has happened.

Those of us privileged to be parents will know that our children don't always do as they are asked and sometimes even reject our commands. We know that causes problems. At an early age can lead to separation with the child on the naughty step or sent to their room. In later life it can bring a total and painful separation of parent and child.

What Paul is describing here is the way that our unwillingness to allow God to be God in our lives, our rejection of his word and will separates us from our heavenly Father. This is what the Bible calls sin. Our sin alienates us from God. However, God didn't want that to continue so he sent Jesus into our world God in human form. He died on a cross. There he died the death we deserve and there he took the punishment we deserve for our rebellion against God and through his death brought forgiveness to us. Through that death we are reconciled to God as it says in v20, "by making peace through his blood shed on the cross".

In Jesus each of us can be forgiven and restored into a proper relationship with God.

This is what God has done for us in Jesus. Jesus as God came to our world to die in our place.

This is the ultimate significance of Jesus as God coming into our world. Yes he displayed his Lordship and authority revealing himself as God but ultimately he came to die. He came to save humanity from the result of our own folly and sinfulness. That salvation is there for all who will receive it.

But we have to receive it.

Many years ago when our children were small we lived in the centre of London and often walked across Regent's park to the zoo. One day on the way back across the park at one of the gates was a woman handing out Wagon wheels, the chocolate biscuit. As we approached I saw her hand them out to several children. When we got there she gave one to each of my children. I felt quite envious because then I quite liked Wagon wheels but I presumed that they were only for children. As we began walking away my daughter Anna asked "didn't you want one daddy?" Looking back I saw the woman holding one out towards me and went back and took it. But supposing I hadn't? All the way home I would have regretted it. Supposing I had thought they were just for others or I was too proud to go and get one?

God in his grace holds out forgiveness to us, to each one of us here this morning but we need to receive it. We don't have to do anything else simply receive what God has done for us in Jesus. The offer is not for someone else it is for you. It is not others who need it but all of us so don't be proud receive what God has done for you.

How do you receive it? You receive it by saying to God you know you are guilty of rebelling against God and ignoring his will for your life and you want to be forgiven and restored through Jesus. It is as simple as that but that simple prayer can restore us to God. Receive it.

This is Jesus, he is God, he is Lord over all creation and he is the Saviour of the world.

Now you may disagree with me and that is fine you are welcome to disagree. But if you are here today or listening to this on download and are disagreeing with what is being said let me ask on what basis do you disagree? Have you read the gospel accounts? Have you discussed your views with those who do believe? Have you asked questions about the Christian faith with an open mind? If you disagree or if you are not sure let me suggest two things. First read one of the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus and try and see for yourself who he is. (Sue Hemingway?) Then secondly bring your ideas or questions to our Christianity Explained course which starts on 7th May. There I'll be happy to try and answer those questions and to explain more about the Christian faith and what it means to be a Christian. If you want the details of the course which is open and free to anyone there are plenty of these cards around.

When I was 21 I became a Christian when someone explained to me the death of Jesus. On that day I received something of much great and lasting value than a wagon wheel and I have tried to follow

Jesus and tell others about him since and it has been an amazing and great journey. It would be a great joy to me and to the angels in heaven if someone today or over the next weeks through Christian Explained began that journey.