

## Sermon Notes – ALL Things!

9<sup>th</sup> October 2022 (SC)

### Colossians 1:15-21

#### A “Wow” Moment

When was the last time you had a “wow moment?” What I mean is, when was the last time you were confronted by something truly breath-taking?

Perhaps it was seeing something in the natural world, a sunset, or the ocean. Perhaps it was seeing a great human achievement like the ruins of an ancient civilisation, or a massive feat of engineering? Perhaps it was listening to a piece of music? Or something striking in the world of the visual arts?

When was your last “wow moment?” and, importantly, what was its lasting impression on you? What has been its lasting impact?

The point is, we don’t live life on the mountaintop, so to speak. Life isn’t a series of uninterrupted awe-inspiring moments, but we move from the mountaintop to the valley floor, we encounter highs *and* lows. And the memory of these great moments can stir up in us courage, or hope, and even joy.

When was the last time your faith was the source of such a “wow moment”?

If we are honest, something about the culture of the Church in this country, something about the culture of our wider society, is that all too often we have too small a view of Jesus Christ. And we fall into the habit of thinking that Jesus was just a kind person, a good person, and before we know it, we begin to think of Jesus like Malcolm from accounting at work, we think of them and say to ourselves, “a nice guy, I must get round to asking him out for a coffee, or for a meal.”

If that’s the case, your view of Jesus is too small.

This was the case for a community of Christians many centuries ago, who lived in Colossae, a riverside town in modern day Turkey. They had heard about Jesus, certainly; they claimed to be Christians, and yet they had started to become unsettled by visiting teachers and preachers who told them their faith required a little something more. Their view of Jesus was being undermined. Their trust in Jesus was being undermined.

Now, I don’t know how you rally round a friend going through a crisis of faith, but St Paul’s answer, was to write to them, and our reading today is an extract of his letter. And in this passage, Paul seeks to do something extraordinary, to re-introduce this community to Jesus in a way that would give them such a “wow-moment.”

*<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.<sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is*

*before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Wow indeed, Paul has managed to say a lot in such a small space.

Now if you are familiar with the letters in the New Testament, or you have regular Bible-reading notes, you might well know that it can help to look out for repeated words or phrases. That can really help us better understand what is being said. And there are certainly repeated words and phrases here.

Paul repeats the words “in him” and “all things” a lot. And if it doesn’t diminish the poetic style of this passage which reads more like hymn lyrics, I think what is being said here, is that who Jesus is, is a matter of grave importance, not just for us, but for all of creation.

This term, we have been looking at what the Bible says about creation – that is, how the Bible tells the story of where we come from, who we are, and what happens next.

People have tried to answer these questions in all sorts of different ways, through the years, to derive purpose from all sorts of different things. And we see how in our world even now, there are many things which shake our confidence that these questions even have significant or meaningful answers. We think of the war in Ukraine and think how can people treat each other with such contempt. We think of the environmental emergency and think how can we treat the world with such contempt, we hear about the worsening cases of mental health among the young, and think how can we feel so lost and alone.

And in light of this - this profound yearning, this profound soul-searching - Paul holds up to us this image of Jesus Christ, in whom there is hope for a confused and confusing world, hope not just for all people, but for all things.

And there is a single phrase I want to focus on in our reading today, that comes in verse 17, where it says: *In him all things hold together.*

I would say, in most families or friendship groups you have that one person who works harder than everyone else to hold people together. You will know who that person is, because they are generally the people who organise who visits whom for Christmas. They are the people that remind you it’s Aunty so and so’s birthday coming up, or that the car insurance is coming up for renewal.

Is this what it means to say that all things hold together in Jesus? As if he is holding everything in the balance, every human affair, the blossoming of every flower, the ebb and flow of every tide, like a frantic musical conductor of an orchestra that’s impossible to manage.

Interestingly, the word used here for “holding together” at this point borrows from a Greek term that means to establish, to consist, to give coherence. So, when it says “in Jesus all things hold together” we are not to think of Jesus running around, stretched to breaking point, but rather, to think that in him, everything finds its place and purpose.

What we are reading then, here, is an invitation from Paul, to view the world in a particular way. To view the world, to view all creation, all human activity, with Christ at the centre, in whom we find our place and purpose within God’s plan, in whom the world finds its place and purpose in God’s plan.

The truth is, every culture and every person views the world through a particular lens. Perhaps right now we think of the world with Putin at its centre, and so we live in fear. Perhaps we think of the world with the climate emergency at the centre, and so we live in despair. Perhaps we think of the world with Covid at its centre and so we live in isolation.

But what would the world look like, if we put Christ at the centre, in whom all things find their place and purpose in God’s plan.

The writer C.S. Lewis once talked about his faith in Jesus like the sun in the sky, and how it is not something he looks at directly at the exclusion of everything else. But rather, it is by the light of the sun, he sees everything else. So too, in the light of the Son of God, we see the world in a new light, in which everything has its place and purpose in God’s plan.

So, this morning, if you are wrestling with your faith, if you wonder if there’s more, if the thought of what’s going on in the news is sapping any sense of hope or meaning, then I invite you to look at the world through the lens of Christ’s creative and redeeming love, his sacrificial love, in whom all things find their place and purpose in God’s plan.

Perhaps then, we might have a new “wow” moment.

Amen