

How Christ Holds All Things Together

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Our scripture reading this morning is from Colossians 1, 15-20.

This is from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, or their thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

[1 : 09] 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. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, Jonathan said my name is Paul. I am really delighted to be here.

I served as a pastor in Palo Alto for 19 years. Lived down in Mountain View. My wife and I have been married for 26 years. We have five kids that are all out of the house.

So we have this great season of emptiness. One of my sons is here with us this morning. He lives not far from here in Berkeley. And my wife is a pastor in Redwood City. So, oh, I forgot I had a picture.

[2 : 13] I was like, what are they looking at? Okay. Yeah. So that's our family. That's me and my wife and our five kids. Yeah. It's a fun season of seeing what God is doing in new ways for us as we enjoy this empty nest season.

It's really fun to be here at Christ Church with you. I've known Bart Garrett for a long time. I've known Jonathan for a few years now. Denise and I, as Jonathan mentioned, have worked together for a couple of years.

And so what a privilege it is to be here. I feel like I'm already a part of the family. Gail was giving me a back rub up here in the front row. I've met some of the young kids. So this is just wonderful.

What a gift to be here. And I love beginning a sermon by reading the scripture because I know that I've said something profound. If everything else is garbage, at least you've heard the word of God read.

So you can rest easy in that. When I was in college, I went to a school on the other side of the bay that is of no importance in this city.

[3 : 17] But I went to a school and I took a class, 101 Psychology. And it was taught by a relatively well-known psychology professor by the name of Philip Zimbardo, who had established some notoriety for some dodgy things he had done early in his career.

And this particular class was all about him. So he gave the lectures. We watched videos as part of the class featuring Philip Zimbardo.

We read a textbook written by Philip Zimbardo. And we did exercises designed by Philip Zimbardo. So you could not have taken part in this class without understanding who he was and his opinions and how he fit into everything.

And it was a little bit awkward because he was a kind of complicated person. But what we're talking about this morning, this passage that we're looking at this morning, is in the same vein, but it's not about Philip Zimbardo.

It's about Jesus Christ. And I figured this was a safe passage to preach at Christ Church because this is all about how Christ is literally in everything.

[4 : 42] Now, this should come as no surprise to you. I hope I'm not coming preaching something that is radically new or radically different.

You're probably not going to walk away from here this morning with some big new ideas. But what I hope we're going to see is how embedded and present and powerful the person of Christ is in every moment of our lives.

Because if you've been a follower of Jesus for some time, you believe in Jesus, you worship Christ, you understand who he is. But I think a lot of us just don't really experience the constant awareness of how present Jesus is.

I think that matters in two big ways. First, because as we walk around as individuals, as we try to live our lives and figure out what to do and make decisions and deal with our emotions and do all these things that the world requires of us, we're not always aware of Christ's role in that detail of life. And then secondly, as we come together as a church and we worship and we try to get to know people and we have studies and we eat fellowship lunches and all these kinds of things, sometimes we're not even aware of the role that Christ plays here among us as a community.

[6 : 14] And so what's beautiful about this passage is it really lays out both of those things. It talks about how Christ is prominent in creation and in everything, but also how Christ features in the church.

We're gonna walk through this passage in two big chunks and look at some of what the Apostle Paul says about who Christ is. Now, I noticed I just learned that there's some third graders in the room for the first time sitting through service.

So I hope you brought a pillow. So here's a little cue. Sometimes I do this when we have kids in the room. I want you to listen for two stories I'm gonna tell.

I'm gonna tell a story about Legos and I'm gonna tell a story about football. So you young kids, the old people, you're fine. The younger kids, listen for those stories as a way of making sure that you're paying attention, all right?

Okay, we're gonna start then with Colossians 1, 15 to 17. And I think I'm gonna have the passage up here. We're gonna just jump through this and highlight some really significant phrases that the Apostle Paul gives.

[7 : 25] The first one is this phrase, the image of the invisible God. See if that gets highlighted. There we go, perfect. All right, so this is kind of a interesting phrase because image is something you see, but an invisible God is something that can't be seen.

And so it's a conflict even in the language that Jesus makes visible what otherwise would be invisible. The Greek word there is the Greek word for icon.

It's what we use, what the church has used for a long time to represent truth. Your iPhone has lots of icons on them. That represent something deeper.

That's what Jesus is. He is the representation, the physical manifestation. He makes tangible God whom otherwise is hard to see.

The image of the invisible God. He's also the firstborn of all creation. Now this is interesting because particularly in the ancient world, and it's still true in a lot of cultures today, being the firstborn was very important.

[8 : 41] The firstborn had certain privileges, had certain responsibilities. The firstborn was kind of the leader of the family. Now what's important here, this Greek word firstborn is prototokos.

Proto is the first and tokos is the word for born. The prototokos, what's important here is not so much that he was the firstborn because he wasn't really born, but that he is the inheritor of what God has designed.

That he is a unique representation of who God is. He is first of all the world in terms of his importance. And we're going to see that come back again later as in the second part of this passage when we talk about Christ having the supremacy over all things.

Third phrase here is that he is over things in heaven and things on earth. Now when we read that phrase, we think about the heavens and to us, because we're kind of in this religious setting, we

think heaven in a religious sense, but what Paul probably meant by heavens was more the sky, the space.

So I want you to imagine, some of you maybe have been in settings like this where you are, where you're somewhere that's very, very dark and you're there at night. Maybe you're on a camping trip or you're out on the ocean somewhere.

[10:13] And if you imagine in your mind what the heavens look like when you're not in a city and you see the stars, you can see the stripe of the Milky Way.

And the Apostle Paul is describing that image to people in the first century that Jesus is creator of all of those things.

And so we can imagine it from their perspective, but we could also imagine it from our perspective because we see those stars and we know a little bit more about what they are. We know that each of those stars are suns with planets in their own galaxies, in a size of space that is completely unfathomable.

And Jesus created all of that. That's what we're told. The Jesus that we worship here today, the Jesus whose body and blood we'll celebrate today, the Jesus who died to save us, created all of that.

Things in heaven and things on earth. Then we get this phrase that he is over all powers, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities.

[11:32] And these words signify different kinds of authorities in the ancient world. There were political authorities, there were religious authorities, there were civic authorities, there were local authorities.

And the point that Paul is trying to make here is that Jesus' authority is over all of those. For us then, we could imagine, and I want to invite you just to think in your head about what kinds of people have authority over you.

For kids, maybe it's your parents. For students, your teachers. If you have a job, then your employer. If you started a company, then it's your investors.

There's local authorities. There's whoever runs Berkeley or the city you live in. There's statewide authorities. There's layers and layers of people for all of us who have some level of authority over our lives.

Some of that we're grateful for. A lot of it, we are less than grateful for. And we don't like it when people have authority over us sometimes.

[12:40] But Jesus rides above all of those layers. Not only is Christ above them, but he instituted them.

It says, in him all things were created. He created all of those levels of authority. Everything with authority over you is under the authority of Jesus.

And hopefully, that makes it easier to live under the authority of the people whom Jesus has established over us. This next phrase is really cool.

It's just so comprehensive. We hear that Christ is, everything was created in him, everything is created through him, and everything is created for him.

Each of those phrases is uniquely important. Everything is created in him. And we don't, this phrase occurs all throughout the New Testament where we have this idea of being in Christ.

[13:44] Christ, as if Christ were a sphere. The image that comes to mind for me is one of those. Anybody have hamsters? Or kids have hamsters? You know those hamster balls? It's like Jesus is a hamster ball, and everything in the universe exists inside that hamster ball.

Everything that happens, all the stars, all the everything, all of our lives, everything is created in him. Jesus somehow contains all of us.

But it also says everything was created through him. And so everything that is, everything that exists, was created through Jesus as the mechanism. He was the way that things came into being. You might think of Genesis 1, where God speaks things into existence, and then we find out later that Jesus is the word of God. So it was through the word of God that things came to be.

All things are created through him. Now all things are also created for him. So they're in him, they're through him, but they're also for his benefit. And so Jesus is the one who receives the goodness of all of creation.

[14:59] Here's the Lego story. You guys ready? So imagine kids building Legos. And you can imagine a kid building this, this intricate Lego design, and then wanting to, to show their parents,

and say, look what I've done.

Look what I've built. It's almost as if God built the world, and then said to his son Jesus, this is for you. All things are created for you.

For you to enjoy and celebrate, have the benefit of. In him, through him, for him, all of these things. And we're just piling layer upon layer of how Jesus is really in literally everything until finally we come to this last phrase where it says that in him all things hold together.

And this is where our minds are really blown. That in Jesus, all things hold together. I want to invite you, maybe you're wearing a shirt or a blouse or pants, just feel the fabric that you're wearing. Just feel it. So this fabric would otherwise burst into atoms flying around the universe except for one thing.

[16:27] Jesus. You probably didn't think about that when you put on your clothes this morning. You probably didn't say, thank you Jesus for keeping the atoms of my clothes melded together so that I can wear this outfit.

But we just read that all things hold together in Jesus. There's maybe some scientists in the room and I'm going to very quickly reveal the limits of my knowledge of physics.

But my understanding of physics is that there is some understanding that there is a kind of a universal force that holds things together. And then we read in the scripture that Christ holds all things together.

And we realize that Christ is literally everywhere. That the reason I'm able to stand on this floor is because the molecules support me through Christ.

Now, this is a lot bigger, a lot vaster, a lot kind of more comprehensive than how a lot of us are taught to think about Jesus. This is so much more cosmic than Jesus was a God who became man who died on your sins so you could go to heaven.

[17:42] And he lived 2,000 years ago and now we have church to sing about him. That's kind of the frame a lot of us have and yet this says that Jesus literally holds the universe together.

Important thing about that for us, there's many important things, but one of the real encouragements is that that Jesus Jesus is with us as individuals.

And so as as unfathomable as it is that Jesus is this cosmic deity that holds the universe together, it's in the same breath we know that Jesus walks with us.

He's present with us. He knows you. He knows in a very real sense what you are experiencing. I went through a season in my life several years ago of a lot of anxiety and insomnia, some depression and it was a really kind of a pruning season for me where I was trying to figure out how to deal with some emotions that were happening and there was an image that was really helpful for me in that season and continues to be of just I would sometimes imagine when I'm walking into situations that cause me anxiety I would just imagine holding Jesus' hand.

And I would imagine it but it wasn't an imaginary thing because Jesus was there with me. It was it wasn't me pretending it was me acknowledging the presence of Jesus with me wherever I went.

[19:21] And what this passage says is that the one who holds all things together is also there to hold our hands. And that's that changes everything.

Changes everything about every situation you encounter about every challenge you face about every mistake you've made that he's forgiven and embraced you for about every calling he's given you that he's invited you into he is there with you the one who literally holds your shirt together also walks with you into this world.

Christ holds all things together and he holds us as we follow him. That's the first thing it's the first part of this passage and it's um it would be enough if that were all Christ did that is that that's enough to just occupy us for for at least a lifetime to reflect on that.

But then Paul goes on and he talks about not just Christ holding all things together individually but then he moves on to talk about the church and this is where it gets really practical for a group of people sitting together in a room on a Sunday morning.

He starts by saying that Christ is the head of the body the church and this is a image that the Apostle Paul uses in various ways throughout the New Testament the image of a body and the image of the distinction between a head and the body of the human.

[20:59] And so it's an image he applies to the church he applies it to marriage in different ways he applies it a couple different times and what's significant about this metaphor is the inseparable nature of the head and the body.

So you know this would be a tragedy but if I were in an accident and I lost my left hand I would be a person without a left hand right?

If I were in an accident and I lost my right leg I would be a person without a right leg. If I were in an accident and my body and my head became separated I would not be a person anymore.

My life would end. So the fact that Jesus is the head and we are the body one of the purposes of that metaphor is to say that there is such an intricate unity between Christ and the rest of the church that if they are to become separated they cease existing as such.

Christ so if by some tragedy Christ church were to lose Christ its connection to Christ it would cease to be a church because the head and the body are inseparable.

[22 : 31] Jesus is the head of the church. Then we have this phrase that he became in all things himself first. This is a really unique phrase. He says he is the head of the body he is the beginning and the firstborn so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Now this is a really weirdly translated phrase. The literal Greek there is in order that he may become in all things himself first. In order that he may become in all things himself first.

You can see why they translated it this way because that other way doesn't really make sense. But the idea is that Jesus is the one for the church that goes before.

It's not supremacy in terms of all the power and authority. It's supremacy as the one who charts the way. Okay, you ready for the football story? Okay, here's the football story.

We went to a football game several years ago. Actually, my son was with me and it was the San Francisco 49ers, which maybe aren't popular here, in the Oakland Raiders in a preseason game.

[23 : 40] So if you're familiar at all with the sport of football, these are two teams that really love each other. It's just like a shared brotherhood and affection between these two teams.

That's a joke. They do not like each other at all. And so this particular game, there was a lot of emotion as we're walking into the stadium. And for some reason, it was a preseason game that hadn't figured out all the systems yet.

So it was like one entry point. And there was this crowd of people that were pressing against this one entry point. And I had, I think, two of my kids there, maybe three. But it was kind of chaos.

And there was fighting over there and there were screaming over there and people had been drinking over here. And so I had my young kids with me. And I remember I grabbed their hands and I just used my body as like a tip of the spear and I just pushed my way, like literally dragging them through this crowd, trying to get through the gate.

And finally we made it through and everything was fine. So that's a little bit about what this passage means by saying Christ is in himself first. That he is the one that drags us, that grabs our hands and pulls us.

[24 : 52] He is the one that goes first and drags us along into his purposes. Jesus. He is the one that absorbs the impact, that takes the risks, that has the vulnerability so that we can be who as a church God created us to be.

The passage continues to say that all of God's fullness dwelt in Jesus. And so this unifier of the church, the head of the church, is God himself dwelling in him for our sakes.

And then we read that through him, through Jesus, God reconciled to himself all things. And so now we have these double images of Christ is the creator of all things, but he's also the reconciler of all things.

All things came into existence because of Christ. And the brokenness of the world also is restored because of Christ.

Because Christ literally drew all things to himself and reconciled them in him to the Father. You can imagine Jesus just like, remember when my kids were very little and they'd be having some conflict and you just like wrap wrap them both in a hug.

[26 : 26] It's like, until they stop hitting each other. You know, it's kind of what Jesus does. Just, I'm going to reconcile all of you to myself. For the purpose of this, making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

peace. Now, we often read this and we think about peace with God, which is true. Jesus makes peace with God so that we can be reconciled to the Father. But this word peace, we read peace and we think kind of like zen.

You know, like, Jesus made peace, I'm okay. which is not totally wrong, but the word is really more about a lack of hostility, about a lack of warfare, about warring entities that have come to a truce.

And so, yes, Jesus made peace with the Father, but what's also in view here, especially because we're in the context of talking about the church, is that Jesus made peace between us.

Jesus stopped the hostilities between us. And, you know, maybe Christ's church is different than the other churches I know, but other churches, people hurt each other.

[27 : 37] They disappoint each other. They make mistakes that affect even generations. They lie sometimes.

They betray trust. And when that happens, what do you do? How do you fix that? How do you come together? How do you continue to worship together?

How do you continue to serve the purposes of God in your city? How do you keep doing that when this person did that thing and they're getting away with it?

Except that they're not. Because Jesus absorbs that. He makes peace. He absorbs the hostility. He creates justice. And he draws us together, enabling us to forgive.

And to move past. And to do the hard work of discussing it, coming together, praying through a reconciliation. Jesus makes peace through his blood on the cross.

[28 : 42] peace. What all of this means is that Christ doesn't just hold all things together, Christ also holds the church together.

Christ is the one who inhabits this community and keeps it from splintering, from going its separate ways.

peace. Just like we heard that Christ is the reason why my clothes don't split apart into atoms in the universe. Christ is the reason why a community of people who follow Jesus stays together and has a bond that allows them to experience the person of God, love.

Love for each other. Love for the world. That's what Christ does. Christ is here, in this place. is not just the God that we come together to worship.

He is present. He is the sinew that connects all of us together, that helps us to overcome hurt and find forgiveness and serve his purposes in the world.

[29 : 54] Christ holds all of creation together. He is there for me. And Christ holds the church together. He is there for us.

So I opened up by thinking about this class that I took with Philip Zimbardo and this very kind of Philip Zimbardo-centric view of the universe that I was forced to endure for a semester.

And that was great. I learned a bunch about this particular person, but then it ended. And yet, what we've talked about this morning is how the person of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the Word of God, the Prince of Peace, all of those things, how Christ is literally in everything, how he walks with us, how he holds us together.

And I think the big takeaway for me, because if I think about what I expect to do the job of holding things together, it's often that I expect that that's up to me.

And maybe you're the same. That there's a lot of things in your life where different priorities, different people, keeping different people happy, and you kind of feel the burden of like, I have to hold it together.

[31 : 17] I have to keep these things together. Or I have to keep the church together, or I have to keep my small group together, or I have to manage this. And so, this word is a word of freedom, of release, of rest, of grace, that you don't have to hold it together.

That's not our jobs. There is one who does that. There's a song I like, and there's a phrase in it that, singing to Jesus, the artist says, I can never let you down because I never held you up.

And that's beautiful. We can never let God down because it's not our job to hold him up. we don't have to hold all things together. That job is taken, and he's doing a great job at it.

So, let me pray for us that we could receive that, that we could live in that, and that we could go from here with that. Father, thank you.

Thank you that we are created by you. We are redeemed by you. We are empowered and sent out by you.

[32 : 28] Thank you that Christ is there, that you are here with us in Christ and through the Spirit, and every second of every day, in all of our decisions, in all of the creation we encounter.

I just pray you'd help us to see that. Help us to develop the habits of living in that, of appreciating it, and of communing with you more and more as we go.

We love you, Jesus. we're so grateful you love us. We pray this in your name and by the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.