

All things are from and for Christ

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[0 : 00] Okay, our Bible reading this morning is from Colossians, reading chapter 1, verses 13 through to verse 20. This is Paul writing to the Christians in Colossae.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[1 : 13] Well, have you noticed a bit of a key word that's been buzzing around with the Manly Seven drama this week?

So, for those who don't know the Manly Seven thing going on, so NRL club made a jersey with rainbow colours to celebrate LGBTQIA plus community.

And seven of the players, out of moral conviction, decided they're not going to wear the jersey and therefore not going to play this round in the NRL.

So that's what's going on. And there's a key word, and I think I picked it up in the Australian Rugby League boss, Peter Vlandi's response in Nine News article.

See if you can hear it. Rugby League is the greatest game for all. Now I want to pause at that point. And I love to debate that, but that's not my main point this morning.

[2 : 16] But he goes on to say, it's inclusive. I think there's the key word. It's inclusive. But at the same time, you have to respect people's religious and cultural beliefs.

Those players are taking a stand and they've got every right to, they've got freedoms to do so. We live in a free country. But as far as the game is concerned, we pride ourselves on being inclusive. Here's how he goes at applying this inclusiveness to the seven players because of their moral convictions. If you don't want to be inclusive and you don't recognise that we're all human beings and we're all the same, then you've got the right to stand down and not play.

Notice how he turned a moral conviction into a lack of affirming that we're all human beings. These players who had worked hard to be in the team and deserve a spot in the team not only needed to sit on the bench, they couldn't come to the stadium out of fear of violence and abuse.

That's our inclusive society. Where's the inclusion of people with moral convictions? Or absolute moral convictions?

[3 : 41] Like, everyone's got moral convictions, but people who believe that there's an absolute morality to the universe, where's the inclusivity for those cultures and people?

I'm going to suggest an explanation for why this story of inclusion can't be equally applied to everyone. And I think I heard it in an interview back with the FINA swimming transgender decision. So a TV interview of Rikki Coughlin, I think you pronounced her name, she got really passionate and very articulate at this point in the interview.

She said, we're talking about people's lives and identities and we're also talking about the kind of world we want to live in. If we want to live in a one dimensional world where we see ourselves as less diverse and as a place that's less welcoming of difference, or if we want a world that is more open and generous and inclusive.

So she said, which world do we want to live in? Those outspoken in the media who are pushing for an inclusive society, it's a storyline.

[5 : 03] It's what we might call a worldview, that we are struggling against oppression and prejudice. We need to create a world where everyone is included on the basis of each individual has the right to choose who they are and how they live.

Underpinning this story is a belief that the material world, what you see, is what there is. There is no higher authority that imposes morality and therefore it's the individual who can create themselves and direct their lives and be the star of the story.

This is how reality is, is what this narrative is saying. This is what we're struggling for. This is the goal of an inclusive society.

It's a story. It's a worldview. And there's two troubling ironies with this story. One is all the claims of being inclusive, as we saw this week in the media, it excludes anyone who does believe there is a moral absolute authority, which if you think about the makeup of our world, with all the religions and cultures, that's excluding a lot of people.

The second troubling thing about this story, this inclusive, what you see is what there is story, is that people talk about it as if it's self-evident fact, which is why the ARL boss can go, they're not treating as human beings. This is self-evident that you should treat someone this way if they're a human being.

[6 : 56] So for instance, if a Muslim and a Christian are having a debate, they both know that they have very different stories about reality. They both know that. It's a question of whether they're going to interact in a tolerant and healthy debate.

I think the troubling thing with this story, this secular story, is people don't see it as a belief system. They see it as just obvious.

And so if you don't believe it, you're out of touch with reality. Stepping to one side for a second. Besides these two ironies that it is actually very exclusive of people and just assuming that it's self-evident when many cultures don't see it as self-evident, I want to ask the question, do you really want to be the author and director and star of your own story?

Like if we just stop and think about that, like we were talking the other day in staff meeting about being a parent and looking after an infant and all this technology these days that can, like a baby monitor that can watch whether your baby is breathing properly and send an alert if their rhythm isn't right.

[8 : 22] But this technology that makes us think we've got control of keeping our baby alive. Do you really want all the responsibility on you, on your shoulders, of whether that baby lives or not?

That's a lot. If you think you've got all the control, that I think increases our fear because we think it's totally up to us.

With all this claim to control our lives, that's a lot of pressure. Do you really want that? Do you want to live in a workplace where everyone is trying to be the star?

Do you really want everyone trying to be the star, trying to get as much credit as possible and climbing over the top of each other to be the highest as possible? Do you really want to be in a workplace?

I know that is the reality for a lot of workplaces, not all. Do you actually want to inhabit that kind of society? Do you actually want to create your identity based on fleeting things like work and sport and relationships where work you can lose so quickly and sport you can get an injury so quickly and relationships can break so they're fragile?

[9 : 56] Like if your identity is pinned in these things that can be here today and gone tomorrow, do you really want to create your own identity? Because if they can be here today and gone tomorrow, can't you be here today and gone tomorrow?

It just tosses you around depending on circumstances. It's a great thing. It's a great thing. So I don't know about you, but the thought of being author and director and star of the story, if you think about it, I'm not sure I want that.

Instead, I think there's a longing in us to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Like even businesses talk about this.

We've got to create a culture where people want to be contributing to something bigger than themselves. That's when it's fulfilling. And I think there's a reason for that. We were made for something bigger than ourselves.

That the satisfying and meaningful life is belonging to a greater story, one where we're not the author and director and star. Now, I found a quote by a pastor from World War II, Dietrich

Bonhoeffer, really challenging at this point.

[11 : 21] This is what he says. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel and what God did in God's son, Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today.

The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die. I found salvation, I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ.

It's kind of the paradox of it. We lose ourselves in the story of Jesus and that's when we find ourselves.

In our passage today, some weeks I'm slightly aware of how poor my words in a sermon is going to get across the passage.

Today is on another level, I think. This hymn is just, it's chock-a-boy. It's comforting in another way because it speaks for itself. You're all wishing I sat down right now.

[12 : 31] But this story, though, isn't like the Greek myths. This is a story filled with flesh and blood and it has been demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt in real time and space when Jesus walked and lived and died and rose again.

So let's just spend a bit of time losing ourselves in this story. First, Christ, he is the author of all that exists.

I don't know if you, I don't know heaps about this, but I came across, do you know the monarch butterfly? It's this orange and black beautiful butterfly.

And it's in lower parts of Canada and parts of America. And this butterfly for the mating season flies like over 4,000 kilometres south to Mexico for the mating season.

Like, how on earth this butterfly can sustain such a journey and they know where they're going without a GPS? Like, it's incredible. Christ is the author, the creator of all things visible.

[13 : 52] He created enough bread and fish to feed a stadium full of people. He was sleeping on a boat that was close to sinking because he had it sorted. He was the one before whom a grown man, after seeing the abundance of fish that the net caught, he fell at his face before such greatness, crying, Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

He is the creator of all things visible. But this son of God is also the author, the creator of all things invisible. The beings in heaven which we can't see, the angelic servants and also the hostile rulers and authorities.

And we saw that in the life of Christ as well, didn't we? The demons shuddered before him. They were cast out with a word. They had no right to refuse him. Now, I know this raises the question of how Satan and his minions came to be hostile, and that's too big a question for us to answer this morning.

And partly I'm not sure we have a full answer for that. But the point here and the point in Scripture is very clear. Satan is on a leash. He is on a leash.

He is always, we see it in the book of Job, He is always under the sovereign rule of the author of creation. Whatever your mind can think of, just try it for a second.

[15 : 21] Anything you can think of, any corner of the world, any human government, stretch your minds to the depths of space where we've got those awesome images of the James Webb telescope.

That butterfly, that monarch butterfly. As you consider the unseen realities, the hostile ones even, what reality is there in your life, in the life of the person sitting next to you, in anyone's life, any nook of the cosmos, that Christ is not the author of?

What's beyond his sight? What's beyond his power, his purpose? We can't find anything. It's all from him. He is the image of the invisible God.

All that the father is, as author and director, all his character is expressed in his son. The father only wants to be known through his son. He is the image of the invisible God.

He is the firstborn. Now that title, that doesn't mean he was the first to be created. Firstborn, and we see that clearly. He is separate from creation.

[16 : 32] He is the one through whom all created things came to be. That's not what firstborn means. Firstborn is a title of authority, and we see it in Psalm 89, verse 27, talking about the Messiah.

And I will make him, the Messiah, the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. It is a title of authority.

He occupies the highest place. He is before all things in time, but that means he is above all things in authority.

So the son of God is the firstborn. He has authority over all things by virtue of the fullness of God's character being on display in him, because he is the one who created it all.

He is the one who holds it together and carries it along. He is the one who directs it all towards its appointed end. He is the firstborn. All things are created through him and for him.

[17 : 38] Which if we pause and just reflect on our own lives for a second. If there's anything in your life that you think you made happen by yourself, that you are finding meaning and purpose in and satisfaction in apart from Christ, then whatever that is, you're living in a fantasy.

It's not reality. Because it's from him and through him and for him. You've lost the plot at that point. All things are in respect to him and have their purpose and satisfaction in him. You know, there's more to the story.

Adam, along with all human race, have tried to live in this fantasy. We've all tried. As creatures who were made to know our God and be filled with his character, representing a ruling over the world.

Under God. Instead, we've tried to be God. We've tried to be that author, creator and star. As if this is expressed differently in our culture currently.

[19 : 05] We try and do this individually. But in other cultures, we try and do it collectively. As if collectively, we can control the world and create the good life. But we just stuff it up.

We just create disorder. There's just brokenness. And that's why it's such good news that the story doesn't end there. Just as Christ is the firstborn over the first creation, he's the firstborn and he has authority over the new creation.

He's going to make everything new. All things are going to be remade, or as this passage uses the term, reconciled to himself under his authority.

And he is the beginning of it. He himself, his own body, him being the firstborn from the dead, it's his own resurrection that is the start of this new creation.

It's like all the heavens and earth were raised up with him when he was raised. It's just, in terms of time, it's coming bit by bit.

[20 : 19] He's the start of it. It all comes through him. He's going to reconcile and recreate everything in himself. Which I think if we reflect on how we became a Christian, it's not so much that you handed your life over to Christ.

It's that he grabbed you in your darkness and death and raised you up with him. We were spiritually born again.

We've entered that resurrected life of knowing God and living for him. And our physical bodies, free from sin, and all heaven and earth will soon follow.

He is the ruler and he is the source of all the new eternal life in knowing peace with God. He is the source of all the new creation of God.

He is the source. He is the source. He is the source. He is the source. He is the source. He is the source. Any other spiritual experience is out of touch with reality.

[21 : 31] He is the author. He is directing all things towards his goal, which we read in verse 20. Through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

So he's the author. He's the director towards bringing everything under his good rule. And he's also the star of the story.

He's the one who has such majesty that angels cover their eyes in his presence before his heavenly throne. And yet he was stripped naked on the cross and put to shame.

He's the star who eternally knew the intense pleasure of the father. He was abandoned. Who deserved all praise and thanks.

Who was mocked and ridiculed. Who dwells in pure light and yet treated as a criminal and took our sins upon himself.

[22 : 43] The source of life tasting death. This is the greatest story there is. It's the highest of glories coming down into the depths, into abandonment and injustice and in guilt and shame and death and conquering it and then raising it all up with himself to the highest place to be reunited with God.

You can't get a better story. And I think there's a reason. That's why I'm a Christian. You can't get it because it is the true story. It's the best story because it's the true story.

It's at the cross that we see the fullness of God's character on display. And it's through the blood of his cross that he reconciles all things, that he achieves the goal of history.

So there will be peace one way or another, whether through forgiveness and enjoying God or whether people will personally experience the justice that he experienced on that cross.

One way or another, he is creating peace. He is the source of all eternal life.

[24 : 02] So do you see why Bonhoeffer said, the fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die? It's more important that we focus on that because that is at the very heart of the story of the universe, the story of our story.

As Bonhoeffer said, I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. So life is found in Christ, not you, being the author and director and star.

And Christ appeals to us in Matthew chapter 10. Whoever finds his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

It's when we lose ourselves in his story, that's when we find it. And what's the fruit of believing this story, of inhabiting this story, of seeing everything about our lives in connection to this story?

What's the fruit of that? I think the fruit would look something like this. Imagine a society where people aren't proud of their own efforts, but who are full of thanks for everything.

[25 : 31] Imagine that kind of society. Imagine a society where people aren't dominated by their fears because they think they're in control, but they're free to pray, and they're free to trust the wisdom of the one who is in control.

Imagine a society of people who know that their future is big. It is a huge future coming. And so they trust the one who bled for them and is directing all things towards that future.

And so they can draw strength from that in every hardship rather than seeing their world as collapsing in. That would be a very stable, persevering society.

Imagine a society where people don't need to prove themselves to know that they are loved, but who have such a deep and constant love from Christ that they are free to think of others.

Imagine a society of people who are so inclusive of every person because they see in every person that they bear the image of Christ, where his blood alone is the basis for belonging.

[26 : 50] Imagine that kind of inclusive society where the society worships such sacrificial love that Jesus has for us that they will imitate him and sacrifice for one another, crossing all the differences that we have in this room.

That would be a marvellous society. Imagine a society of people so passionate about convincing others that life is only found in Christ, that they won't do cancel culture, they won't exclude people who don't believe, they won't be violent in words and deeds, they will shed their own blood in following this saviour, trying to convince, yeah, life is here.

We don't have to imagine such a society. It's called Christ's body. It's called the church.

Now, I know we see it, but the point of Colossians, the point of us dwelling in this story is that we grow in this story and become more and more of that society.

The church's witness of a better society will depend on the degree to which we inhabit this story and go deeper and deeper and deeper in it, where Christ is the author and director and star.

[28 : 24] To the degree that you and I are convinced that life is, all of life is found and connected in Christ, we won't be deceived to look for it elsewhere.

That will create such a society and bring glory to the Lord Jesus. So I want to briefly finish by asking, what prevents us then?

What is it that prevents us from experiencing this fullness by living in this awesome story? What holds us back? I think a large barrier is because this story exposes our darkness.

If he is the author, the more I realise that, the more I see how little I thank him. If he is the director of all things, the more I realise that, the more I see how little I trust him and want to live in his ways.

If he is the star of the story, the more I am exposed in how much I'm competing for his glory. I think this story exposes us and that holds us back from going deeper in it.

[29 : 58] So it's not the smallness of this story that holds us back. I think it's the greatness of this story that holds us back from going deeper in it because it exposes our guilt and shame in not treating this awesome Christ as he deserves.

And so I think we could be tempted to think that it's more loving and kind to treat ourselves and treat each other according to our society's narrative.

Let's just treat each other on the basis of you're the author and director and star. I think we hear it when we appeal to one another. Do it for your sake. It will benefit you.

We hear it when we downplay sin. We don't hold it to the light of Christ and see it and call it what it is. We just call it personal choice, personal freedom.

Why do we do that? I think we do it because we're hiding from this Christ. But to withdraw from him is not the solution.

[31 : 02] It's the blood of his cross that frees us, that invites us, that calls us to move towards his greatness.

It's the blood of his cross. The more we see how worthy he is for our thanks and our trust and our lives, and the more we see the gap of how we don't give him that, that very gap is what will help us go deeper and deeper in seeing how precious that blood of the cross is.

That gap is not something we should be frightened of. It actually will be what helps us love him more and more. As Christ himself said to the woman weeping at his feet, he who is forgiven much loves much.

So let's not deny one another the true experience of peace and joy and power in knowing the fullness of God through the forgiveness of his blood.

Let's show our society what a truly inclusive world looks like when we sacrifice for one another following our sacrificial law. And we're only going to do that when we help one another inhabit this great story, not afraid of our darkness being exposed because it will actually help us delight in the blood of his cross.

[32 : 44] Let me finish with Christ's own words. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Let's believe that and inhabit this great story as Christ's people here in this church.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, help us not to be afraid of your light that exposes whatever remaining darkness is in us.

Lord, help us to believe that the blood of your cross has brought about peace with you, that we have full access to you, God, as our Father, and that you are inviting us deeper and deeper into yourself.

Lord, convince us of this so that together we might dwell and connect all of our life individually in our families as a church connected into this great Christ so that we might honour you and be a witness for you.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.