

Sermon – July 17, 2022  
“The Hope of Glory”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Colossians 1:15-28

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into this mission field. Amen*

Good morning! Has anyone begun to use the prayer Paul shared with us as they pray for each other? The words of Paul's prayer from scripture are now also on the back of the bulletin with the two prayers for us to use as we seek to be open to Holy Spirit's guidance.

Time of discerning prayer continues this evening at Afton at 6 pm. Come and learn more about the opportunities and challenges that we face as a church, and join together for a time of prayer as we lift up our hearts and seek to hear the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, speak to our situation. Encourage people in the community to attend as there seems to be growing disinformation about what we are praying over circulating in the community. Come, share your thoughts, ask questions, listen to each other, search for answers, join together in prayer, and listen for Jesus' voice as we discern where Jesus is leading us.

In the coming weeks, I will be sending out a letter to all of the inactive members for whom we have addresses. This letter is an invitation for them to again live into the membership vow they took before God when they became members of this congregation. My intent is to invite them back into that vow and for Fairfields UMC or Afton UMC to be the place, the local body of Christ, where they are living out that vow in the love of Jesus. I will also be asking them if they would like to remain members of this church, inquire if they have joined other

congregations, and, if they are not living out their vow with another local congregation, ask if we can help them do so. Please add these letters to your prayers. Ask Jesus to use them to encourage inactive members to remember the vow they took and to stir their hearts to join with us to live out that vow in the love of Jesus.

Let's look at this morning's scripture. Let me start by reading again the first two verses, Colossians 1: 15-16: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers— all things have been created through him and for him." Since the earliest understanding of God began to develop, humanity has been struggling to have an image of an invisible God. We encounter the qualities of God, His eternal power and divine nature, and it is in these qualities that we glimpse and can encounter God from our experience with creation. It is also these qualities that Paul tells us in Romans leave humanity without excuse; we know that there is a God. We are aware of God even if we refuse to accept that there is a God. Creation does give us insight into God, but Jesus is the complete revelation of God to humanity. In Christ we see the God of mercy and love. We catch a glimpse of a God who will send His only Son to rescue humanity from their bondage to sin. We catch a glimpse into the depth of steadfast love God has for us. Calvin states it well: "In Christ God shows us 'his righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self.'" (Garland, 87)

In this morning's passage, there are many attributes of Jesus that Paul packs into a few verses. Let's look at just a few of them briefly this morning. If we were to open a Hebrew Bible and go to the last page and the upper right top corner of that page, we would find the words "In the beginning." The Hebrew word translated as "in" has three meanings in Hebrew: "in," "by," and "for." These are three of the attributes of Jesus Paul speaks to in his letter that we will look at this morning. We will unpack, or begin to unpack, the statement, "that all things were created in Christ, by Christ and for Christ."

In order for all things to be created by Jesus, we need to have Jesus present before the beginning of creation. To be present before creation means that Jesus pre-exists all of creation. Jesus is with the Father prior to the creation event. Now this is not the person of Christ the Bible speaks of in human form. But the words here are "he is before all things" not in human form but one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Also notice that Jesus creates all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, thrones or dominions, rulers or powers. It is by Jesus all

things are created. There are a large number of people, governments, and things that do not recognize Jesus as their creator. That places an emphasis on our role as the church, in the image of Christ, to so love those of the world that they begin to see their creator.

For the next attribute of Jesus, let's look at verse 17: "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." The second half of verse 17 makes the point that "in Him all things hold together." It is through Jesus' continued presence and action that all of creation holds together. This week we have been blessed with new images of the stars that surround us through the new space telescope that is now active and capturing light from distant points in the universe. Keep in mind, as we see these images, that it is Jesus Christ working in creation that keeps the cosmos from descending into chaos. God is not a watchmaker who made creation, set it into motion, and is now watching from some distant place as it moves through time. God, through Jesus, is holding all things together, great and small. We may not see Jesus at work in the universe, but as we see the order and beauty of the heavens that testify to the glory of God, we see the ongoing work of Jesus sustaining all things.

Humanity is in Adam, the first man, and as such has a sin problem, a desire to place ourselves into the place that God alone occupies. Our sin problem results in us being separated from God. Yet in the midst of our sinful state, Jesus is at work to hold all things together. In our fallen state, we are those who need to be reconciled to God. Our hearts yearn for something more. Our yearning is the relationship we were made to have with God. We seek to find ways to satisfy our need for God through things, worldly cares, and distractions. All of our searching comes to the same endpoint, failure to fill this void, and we continue trying to fill the void within ourselves with anything we think will end our yearning. We need a way to be reconciled to God for only God can fulfill our yearning.

It is to this attribute that Paul also speaks in these verses: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." Think about Jesus: he was the focal point through which creation came, so also he is the one through whom we are reconciled to God. Jesus was the means through which creation was brought and he is the sustainer of creation. Jesus became human that he might reveal God to humanity, and it is through Jesus that God reconciles us to Himself by the blood of the cross. The idea of shed blood implies death, violent death. When Paul speaks to the idea of shed blood, he is speaking of

the death of Jesus Christ that we might be reconciled to God. As Jesus was the means through which all creation came, so also through his death we are given a path to be reconciled through Christ to God. God makes possible through Jesus a path to reconciliation, yet we too have a role, to be those who are securely established and steadfast in the faith holding fast to the Gospel. The Gospel is not a secret gospel whispered at times in the quiet, but one that is being openly and boldly proclaimed in all places. The Gospel may not have yet penetrated into all places and to all people, but we live in a time when the present evil age has been openly invaded by the Gospel and is to be proclaimed by every believer. This is our role as the church, to follow Jesus boldly into his mission to all people and share the Gospel starting right here, right now, and to continue to share in all the places that Jesus leads us.

Notice it is not just all humanity that is reconciled to God through Christ, but as Paul tells us in Romans 8, “All creation groans to be again in the fullness of creation.” In the letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that creation has been “subjected to futility” but as humanity is reconciled to God, so also, by the redemptive work of Jesus, creation is released from its bondage to decay. “All” means not just the children of God, but includes all of creation that groans and yearns to be again in the fullness of the creation of God through Jesus.

This morning at Fairfields, we are blessed as a congregation to welcome into the kingdom of God Richard and Noah Myers. We are given this privilege through Jesus’ death, through his shed blood on the cross. Let us now move into the service of baptism and celebrate with the host of heaven the baptism of these two children of God.

This morning we are also blessed to welcome into the Afton congregation Liz and Roy Crawford. Liz and Roy come to us from another congregation and are transferring their membership to Afton UMC so that they may be part of Jesus’ mission to all people here in this place. Let us move now into a time of welcoming them into this congregation.

*Pray with me: Jesus, we thank you that your servant Paul shared with the Colossians such great insights into who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us. Help us to grasp more deeply the fullness of what it means “that all things were created in Christ, by Christ and for Christ” and that we are reconciled to God through your work not only at creation but through your shed blood. Jesus, we give thanks and praise you for your great love for us. We pray this morning and always in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

PRAYER TO HOLY SPIRIT

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

*Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430)*