

Making Room for Oneness
Colossians 1:15-21
November 26, 2023
North Decatur Presbyterian Church
Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,¹⁶ for in Christ 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 Christ and for Christ. ¹⁷ Christ is before all things, and in Christ all things hold together. ¹⁸ Christ is the head of the body, the church; Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that Christ might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through Christ God was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.

I'm an armchair physicist. Something about the process of knowing how the world works gets me excited. Every couple of months, there will be an announcement about some big discovery in the world of theoretical physics—we'll get that much closer to understanding the very nature of the universe I'll sit down and read about the discovery and... then read it again... and then read it again to make sure I haven't understood a darn thing. And I even though I can't grasp any of it, I always feel something akin to religious awe.

The great frontier of physics these days is the “unified theory.” We're trying to harmonize what we observe about the behaviors of big things—stars and planets and galaxies—with what we observe about little things—atoms and subatomic particles. There's a great debate about whether or not we will ever be able to come up with what is called the “Theory of Everything.”

Even if you don't care for physics, most of us have felt a longing, at some point, for a “theory of everything.” For thousands of years, religious people have wondered how things hold together. What causes the sun to rise every day with such regularity? What holds the moon and the stars in their courses? What causes us to watch leaves gently fall and feel a kind of kinship with them as we see a glimpse of our own mortality? What causes us to look at buds in the early spring and feel inside of us what can only be described as hopefulness? Why can we gaze at a horizon and feel the same spaciousness inside ourselves?

Sometimes, when you slow down long enough to take stock of your own life, and you look around you and you think about all the things you've seen and all the people who have been a part of your life and all the human strength and compassion you've seen in communities around the world, does it ever seem to you unlikely? But so beautiful. Our hearts grow full—we get “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

Something in us is hungry to see this whole existence as something other than an accident. That struggle isn't pointless; that our joys truly are the purpose of our creation. Our existence is so often marvelous that feels like it could be the work of an artist. Like this is all a vast canvas, and we are billions of brush strokes. If we could only stand back and see the whole, then we'd know.

Is there unity at the heart of all things?

At the very beginning of the letter to the Colossians, the writer drops in a song. The passage we're reading this morning is not prose—it's a poem, a song the writer is quoting. It's not science, it's a feeling. The feeling is that the whole universe seems to come together in the mystical figure of Christ.

Christ is the image of the invisible God. God is a mystery, Scripture says, hidden from our eyes—often for our own good. But in Christ, the image of God is revealed. God's *character* is made plain before our eyes. God is wise. God is good. God heals and teaches. God has patience, and mercy. God loves especially those of us who feel outside the circle and those who are mistreated. God loves even the enemies of God. God's strength, we see, in Christ is in weakness—weakness we see when Christ bleeds for Christ's enemies, instead of trying to physically conquer them. In a cosmic flash, Christ makes God visible.

The other image in this this song that is so resonant is the image of being the "firstborn." In Greek, "prototokos." Christ is prototokos of creation *and* prototokos from the dead. Firstborn of Creation suggests that what we have been talking about so much this fall is true—that we human beings are inextricable from our land, the soil, the air. Christ is part of all created things, an energy that enlivens and sustains all things. The earth is the body of God, the body of Christ. Creation lives, breathes, and moves—the creation itself can experience joy and suffering. Creation is our kin. What would change in you if you knew the earth itself is Christ's body? We would you crucify that body, or would you honor it?

Christ, this song says, is not just the firstborn of creation. Christ is also firstborn of the dead. This is a simple affirmation of the most unlikely, most marvelous of all ideas: resurrection—Jesus was resurrected and so will everyone be who is in Christ. In resurrection, the integrity and the sacredness of humanity is affirmed. The resurrection is a dignification of life. Every human being—every brushstroke of the divine—is an essential part of the whole picture, no life is insignificant. In the same way that matter is never destroyed, no human soul, once created, is destroyed. We die, but we are resurrected, so that all of us are joined together in the great banquet feast that is coming when the earth and heaven and time and eternity are one.

This Colossians hymn is poetry. It's not science. But it does give us a theory of everything. In Christ, all things hold together. There is a bond that holds together people and creation and time and space. Separateness is the illusion. The lines we draw on the earth that separate one nation from the other are fictions. The stories we make up about "those people" being different from us are lies. We are all one.

Something inside of us intuits this unity. When we quiet down, "center down," we get closer to that unity. Howard Thurman's discipline of meditation and quietness drew criticism from people who felt like he wasn't working hard enough to challenge social systems that divide people. But Thurman's conviction was that when he "went down" into the quiet, when he entered into Communion with God, it was never "just" a private encounter. He believed that Communion

with God is a kind of communal event. It is a joining together, his Spirit, with the same Spirit that joins all things. Meeting God in your time of quiet is knowing you are connected to everything, and everyone.

Quietness isn't an escape from the world. It is discovering the truth about the world—this is all one, and you belong in the oneness. Social justice, flows from—and is fed by—meditative prayers. Thurman called social justice “an expression of resistance against whatever separates us from the experience of God who is the very ground of being.” Our calling isn't only to share food with those who are hungry, or house those who are without homes, or defeat oppressive ideologies—our calling is remove every obstacles that prevents people from knowing communion with God and experiencing the oneness of all things.

Call it “a unified theory.” Call it a “theory of everything.” Say “In Christ, all things hold together.” Or shrug your shoulders and say, “I have no idea what it is, but I know, deep down, that this is all one... and you and I—we—belong together.”

