**Sermon Text**: Colossians 1:13-20

**Occasion**: Last Sunday of the Church Year, 20 Nov 2022

**All Things Reconciled**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

***15****He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.****16****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.****17****And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.****18****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.****19****For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,****20****and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* (Colossians 1)

Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God; not only being the fullness of God dwelling bodily among us but also making all of creation that we might observe the Lord’s power and order through it (Rom 1:20). Jesus is the firstborn of creation, meaning that he has the rights of a firstborn son to inherit all things. Everything that is created was created through Christ as God—there is nothing that has been created which he did not create (John 1:3). Therefore, Jesus is above all things and all things depend on him. When Jesus came into the flesh, he died upon the cross. He created all things; all things are sustained through him; all things are his inheritance; therefore it only stands to reason that when he offers his life upon the cross, all things through him are reconciled back to God.

This is something unimaginably profound. When Jesus died upon the cross for our salvation, he died not only so we might be saved. He died so that all things he created might have a place in his salvation. Not only will we find each other in paradise, but paradise itself will be brought forth from the old world. The whole of creation has been groaning together in the pains of expectation for the day we are brought into the resurrection (Rom 8:22) for that is when all things reconciled by Christ may join us in paradise. It makes sense that the creation is awaiting the fullness of our salvation since it has suffered the effects of sin just as we have. God created the first man, Adam, from the dust of the earth. When he fell into sin, the whole of the earth fell with him. God cursed Adam by declaring, “Cursed is the ground on account of you.” (Gen 3:19) But this makes more poetic sense in Hebrew because “ground” in Hebrew is “’adamah" and the word “Adam” stands for the man who came from the ground.

When Jesus entered into our flesh, that is, when he came from heaven to earth to be born on Christmas Day, Jesus came into the flesh of fallen humanity. He did this to raise us from death to new life. He saved us from returning to the ground from which we were taken. And in so doing, he redeemed his creation. He reconciled all things. Not only is your flesh promised to survive death and be found in the resurrection. This world will be transformed from its sin-soaked state to be a place worthy of Christ’s holiness. Christ has created all things, sustains all things, and reconciles all things.

Yet, we know painfully well that not everyone will be found in the salvation of the re-created earth. We see this in our Gospel reading from this morning. There were two criminals on either side of Jesus during the crucifixion. One of the criminals mocked Jesus yet the other asked for Jesus to think of him. Jesus turned to the one who had faith and told him that he would enter paradise. The criminal on Jesus’ other side was given no such promise on account of his unbelief.

It is not as though Jesus did not die for the unbelieving criminal, nor for the soldiers who crucified him, nor for the people who sentenced him to death. Jesus is the Saviour of all people especially those who believe (1 Tim 4:10). So, why are some saved and not others? It all comes down to faith. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ receive him and the salvation he brings. Those who do not believe have no means by which to grasp the promises of God at the cross. In Jesus’ day, he came to his own people, and his own people did not receive him (John 1:11). Instead, they nailed him to a cross. Yet, Christ meant this blaspheming for good. By the blood of his cross, Jesus reconciled all things he created to God (Col 1:20). Death could not hold Christ in the grave nor could sin destroy him. Jesus defeated sin and death in his death to sin once for all.

And in contrast to those who rejected Jesus in his day, in our day today, many reject Jesus by hearing this good news of salvation and saying, “No.” People may say no to Jesus, although recognizing the salvation he offers, and decide they want no part of it. Others say no when they decide Christ’s death and resurrection are a fairy tale and not the documented facts they are. Another common reason for rejecting Christ with a firm “no” is that people desire to remain in their sins, finding more pleasure in lustful indulgence than the comfort found in the reception of forgiveness. People do this all the time when they opt not to gather to hear God’s word, or receive Christ’s body and blood in the fellowship of this altar or confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. And sometimes we are tempted one way or another with one of these things. You might have even been lost in worst ways at some point in your life, living as if Christ had not died for your sins.

But Christ has come for you. He died for you. He shed his blood for you. So, you have most definitely been reconciled back to your God by the blood of Jesus’ cross. Once you were separated from God and hostile to Him, not living according to His holiness but living in sin. Reconciled to Christ, you are joined to the flesh that died to sin on the cross and that stepped out of a powerless grave. (Col 1:21-23) You are united through faith to the one who has made all things perfect in the beginning and makes you perfect through his flesh.

Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. You see him clothed with his own creation—not only seeing the immensity of His power and thoughtful ordering of the creation. You not only see Christ in history who was clothed in flesh and witnessed by the disciples who wrote of him. You see Christ when he clothes himself with water, the word, bread, and wine. He comes that you may know him so you may receive the benefits of his sacrifice in Word and Sacrament. He is present and he gives to you all things.

Jesus is the firstborn of creation. He created all things and is therefore the heir of all things. When he joins himself to you, you receive all things through him. Nothing is meant to be left defiled and unholy. All things are meant to be reconciled to the Lord. Although Jesus declares that in the last days, when the Son of Man comes to claim his inheritance of all things (Luke 21:25-28), that there will be an outcry to the hills and mountains. People will beg for these monuments of nature to break and fall to cover them from the judgment of God (Luke 23:29-30). But Jesus has come for the reconciliation of all things. In the new heavens and new earth, the creation will be restored. If God so wills, broken mountains and hills will be reset to tower over us in display of the beauty God adorns creation.

Yet, Jesus will also honour the desires of those who live apart from faith in him. He will not force them into heaven but permit them to perish in their unbelief. A sad and lamentable truth. But Jesus died for them. Knowing the love of Jesus Christ and the comfort of his salvation, we should pray for all those who live outside of it (cf. 1 Tim 2:1). Pray without ceasing that they may have Christ—that they be joined with him through faith and find the peace of the blood of the cross which takes away sins. May we also be encouraged to witness Christ crucified to everyone so all might hear the word of the Lord and be saved.

This world is not a paradise; we desire something more. This is why we have already entered into the kingdom of Christ through faith. We recognize the failures of body, mind, and spirit and need relief. We need a place of rest where we can do what the Lord has ordained us to do. We desire to be with our Lord openly and not cowering behind our guilt and shame. The Lord will remember us in his kingdom because we are already present with him in it. Your soul has been made holy and pleasing to the Lord in Christ; now all that must be done is wait with eager expectation for the holiness of God to be brought down to us.

Christ has prepared us through his sanctifying blood to stand before our God in glory. And we will see Him with our own eyes once the creation has been given over to judgment. Our Lord will refine it, make it holy once more. Sin and its effects will have no place there. The creation will be holy as the Lord is holy. And when we are ushered into the paradise of our Lord, we will truly see him face to face. Christ will be the visible image of the invisible God. He will be our creator—the one who has sustained us every day of our lives and who will sustain us for eternity. All this has been promised to us through the forgiveness found poured out at the cross. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.