

Church in the Valley: All About the Son
A message based on
Colossians 1:15-23

Followers of Jesus:

Before we read the verses this morning, a word of introduction. Margaret Clarkson was born in Melville, Saskatchewan way back in 1915. In 1946 (at the age of 31) she was asked by the general director of Interservice Christian Fellowship in Canada, a student organization that still exists today, to write a song. The song was first sung in December 1946 in Toronto at a Missionary Convention, which today is known as Urbana. That song is filled with biblical phrases, something Clarkson's hymns are well-known for. This hymn was written as a sort of call for believing students to unite (Source: Hymnary.org). It is called simply, "We Come, O Christ to you." Stanza one goes like this:

**We come, O Christ, to you,
True Son of God and man,
By whom all things consist,
In whom all life began.
In you alone we live and move
And have our being in your love** (Margaret Clarkson).

Things have not changed a lot. As soon as the New Testament church was born, hymns were written to express the faith of God's people. Paul refers to this in this letter to the church in the valley.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Col 3:16).

We find such a hymn here in Colossians 1. Let us now be attentive to the Word of Christ as we read it now.

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Followers of Jesus:

Thirty-one million watched for over three hours. Those are the numbers reported by the New York Times of how many people watched on t.v. the funeral of Michael Jackson (“Jackson Service Draws 31 Million Viewers”). In another article from that newspaper (“A Day [and Night] Devoted to Michael Jackson”), there were questions as to why so much media coverage was given for this media star. The novelist Kurt Anderson made up a word for it, combining “obituary” with “entertainment”:

“obitutainment” (Kurt Anderson).

All this for just one man who entertained many with his song and dance!

Paul and Timothy have heard things about this church in the valley, and their first response was praying thanks to God. They were so grateful for what God was growing in this church.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9).

Remember how we saw last week that this church in the valley was enticed to seek after some sort of secret knowledge? Their prayer is to counteract this trend. The knowledge they needed to be filled with was the knowledge of God’s will. What was God’s will? God’s will is all about the Son.

It was probably the most important question ever asked. It was asked by Jesus to the Twelve in one of their private conversations. It began in typical Jesus-fashion. He moved from the general, to the more personal.

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”...

“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”...

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:13,15-16).

The early church loved Jesus, the Son of the living God, so much, that they wrote a hymn about him.

We can't really see the way it's printed in our Bibles now, but people who look deeply into these things see these lines as poetry, according to F.F. Bruce. Many new songs today are written with the same structure,

Stanza one: the significance of the Son in the first creation; he is the firstborn over all creation (vss 15-16).

A Bridge: the significance of the Son for the church (vss 17-18a).

Stanza two: the significance of the Son in the new creation; he is the firstborn from among the dead (vss 18b-20) (from F.F. Bruce).

We can't cover everything in this magnificent hymn, but there are a few things I'd like to bring out which hopefully are the most important. Each stanza begins with the phrase, "*He is.*" Stanza one:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15).

The Message translates: "We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything he created."

In the beginning, according to the first book of the Bible which we call "Genesis," God created everything that is visible and invisible; including those invisible beings called here, "*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*" (vs 16). He saved the best to almost the last. He created a man and a woman in his image and in his likeness (Gen 1:26-27). We were created – take note of this! – to be in some way like God! However, someone came along and spoiled it all, tempting the woman through deception, and the man through disobedience. The image of God was not lost that day, but it most certainly was scarred; wounded with a grievous wound that remains to this day.

The Son we look at now is God's perfect representative, fully living out what God's original purpose was, to be like God. This Son also is,

according to Michael Card, "known by the scars," but these are not there because the Son was somehow deceived, or that he in the end disobeyed God. These are there because the Son, in whom is the fullness of God, was crucified on a cross, shedding his blood so that we might be reconciled to God.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:19-20).

Please pay attention to these words which are all about the Son. It wasn't God's fault that we, through Adam and Eve, fell into sin. Yet – and here is the mercy of our God! – he is the only one who can do anything about it, what F.F. Bruce calls "the great change." The verb – the action word – used here is "*to reconcile*." This word "reconcile", according to John R. Stott, is a relationship word used by families and friends. What does it mean?

We know what it means when we think about it's opposite. This is how Paul brings out the meaning in verse 21. He uses some very harsh words to describe the way things are when we don't have the Son of God on our side. He writes of being "*alienated from God*." When I think of that word, I think of a relationship that is strained. Something happened, and suddenly we have a very difficult time speaking in a kind way. Alienation speaks of distance and even cold, cruel silence. People can't speak peaceably to one another if they are alienated from one another, because just below the surface of every word spoken is this notion of injury, hurt, a scar that keeps opening up again and bleeding puss.

This is the way things are between us and God, without the Son. There's something even more. Verse 21 uses the phrase of being "*enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour*." Enemies to whom? Enemies to God! This could be an active thing where we say some things that show that we indeed hate God; or it can be a passive thing, where we are more casual about it, yet it comes to the same thing. God doesn't interest us, and when it comes down to it we don't care for him. And we show it in the way we live. We may love our parents, love our spouse, love our children;

we may work hard with great care to do it well; we may be courteous to our neighbours. But God, God is far from our consciousness, God is simply not part of our every-day thought patterns.

All this changed when we saw who the Son was. The second stanza.
... he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy (Col 1:18b).

He is the firstborn from among the dead, and as such is the source of our life. His resurrection life is now in us who believe. It is incredible power, described as "*all power according to his glorious might*" (vs 11).

It is because of this power that two words are full of meaning for us today. It begins already in his relationship to the first creation, and continues into his relationship with the new creation.

**... all things were created by him and for him... (1:16)
and through him to reconcile to himself all things... (1:20)**

The cross of Jesus Christ touches all things that God created. All things: the rain that fell this week, we can say that it was his rain. The work we did this week, we can say because of what Jesus did on the cross, that it was his work. The games we played this week, since he gave the inventor of the game the mind to think of it, they are his games. The camping that we do using tents or RVs: these are his, and so we use them accordingly. The vehicles we drive in are his; as are our homes; as are the lands we say we own – though we may vaguely know that the earth is the LORD's and everything in it and that he owns the cattle on a thousand hills. The money we earn is not ours to use as we sit fit; it is his money; we're just borrowing it from him. Everything, all things are now under the command of Christ, directed toward him, for the praise of his glory.