



TOUCH POINT

In Christ All Things Hold Together – Touchpoint for July 13, 2022

(July 17, 2022 Epistle reading, in four sections)

Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV) ¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ 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 and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Our Brother Jim greets us weekly:

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

This greeting is embedded in the Hebrew tradition. It was critical in the commitment to reach out beyond the Jewish Christians to the rest of us. And it sustains us today as we grow into effective servants of the gospel.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation... in him all things hold together...”

So, where does this passage touch me?

- First of all: In my world, this kind of language seems so big, so extensive, and so out there that it is almost too much to believe.
- And secondly: I need to believe this, especially at this time.

The statement, *“Christ is the image of the invisible God”* – that’s something we can maybe handle. We can put that on our coffee mugs and tee shirts, and even in our movies. That part maybe we can handle.

But the rest of it is harder to easily take in:

- *“Everything that was created was created in him”* (or *“by”* him, as some translations show).
- This includes *“all things,”* whether we can see them or not; and even includes governments and ruling powers.

- Christ is held out as being “before all things.”
- And then the passage suggests that in Christ “all things hold together”!

Really? In the halls of our seminaries, this is what you might call a “big Christology”!

What’s going on here with the Colossians? A little background: According to the best Biblical scholarship out there, this epistle was written somewhere around the year 80. It was written about 50 years after Jesus’ life, ministry, execution, and resurrection. The earliest of our four Gospels was the Gospel According to Mark, written around 70 A.D. Our other three Gospels were written between 80 and 110 A.D.

Why is this important? Because in those years before this, people knew about Jesus, and the believing communities had become a growing reality:

- They had already established that the “followers of the Way” could include both Jews and Gentiles.
- They were already struggling with whether or not they could or should put restrictive requirements on insiders vs. outsiders in their faith communities.
- They already knew, and had passed on by word of mouth, and dozens of writing fragments (which did not make it into our Bible) the life and message of Jesus.
- And, they lived under the dominion of the Roman Empire’s imperial theology that proclaimed that the emperor was the Son of God, Lord, Savior of the World, and the one who had brought peace on earth. This is the context of their reality.

Into this world, the early writers in the faith proclaim something quite to the contrary:

- Jesus, not the emperor, is the Son of God, Lord and Savior. God, as revealed in Jesus, was Lord, and the emperor was not!
- In this context, St. Paul’s most concise affirmation about Jesus was “Jesus is Lord.”
- And to teach that was high treason. It is not surprising that Paul, like Jesus, was eventually executed.

Into this environment, the words to the believers are heard: *In Christ all things hold together*. Really? It must have been tough to believe that then too, don’t you think?

Further, I can’t imagine that the Apostle Paul, in his wildest imagination, anticipated that his letter to these believers in Colossae (modern Turkey) would be read by us 2000 years later!

Today, our world view has expanded a bit since then. Our “big picture” has continued to grow. Even the brilliant Apostle Paul did not likely comprehend the vastness of space, or space travel. As my friend, Jim, an astrophysicist who worked on the James Webb Space Telescope helps me understand:

- There are more stars in our single galaxy than there are human beings who have ever lived on the face of this earth in all of its history.
- There are more galaxies in our universe than there are stars in our single galaxy.
- Our galaxy is only one of billions of galaxies in the universe.
- And now, we are talking about the “multiverse” – more than one universe.

In Christ, “all things” hold together? Wow!

As a teenager, I attended a good Lutheran church in North Hollywood, California. And I was introduced to a little book written by J. B. Phillips – *Your God is Too Small*. As I have learned every year since – clearly, he was right. Our understanding of God continues to expand, as our understanding of “all that we can see” continues to expand.

In the last few weeks, I have become aware of how much I want and need to believe that “in Christ, all things hold together”:

- Every morning I am reminded of the countless examples of the brokenness of our country and our world.
- As neighbors on this spinning little globe, we seem unable to find and choose the “reconciling” paths that sustainably embrace all of us.
- I am increasingly aware of the difficulty we have in “following the Way” of Jesus as we live and move and experience life. (As Anne Lamott recently wrote in the New York Times: “I pray to remember that God loves Marjorie Taylor Greene exactly the same as God loves my grandson, because God loves, period. God does not have an app for ‘Not Love.’ God sees beyond each person’s awfulness to each person’s needs.”)
- And lately, I have been feeling so deeply the pain and loss of the health and vitality of close friends who are fighting for their lives.

I need to hear... really need to hear and trust these good, bold, hope-filled words:

- In Christ, all things... visible and invisible... all powers that seem at times to overshadow the mercy and love of God...
- all things are held together because of Christ.
- God was pleased to have his fullness dwell in Christ.
- And through Christ, we have been reconciled to God.

Is this easy to hold on to? “Easy” is probably not the right word. I think I need to ask, “HOW can I hold on to these bold promises?”

Listen to the message: *Yes, you can do this – “...if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”*

So, again today, we gather around our ZOOM table, to re-member ourselves as Christ’s body, in Christ’s compassion for each other and our world.

As the early Christians gathered to support each other, shared their table of food and drink, and remembered the new covenant promise in Christ’s body and blood for forgiveness, and reconciliation of all things...

They, with us, heard these words: *“In Christ all things hold together.”* I want to believe that. I “need” to believe that! And with God’s grace, if we can hold each other together, with patient expectation and prayer, we just might be able to join St. Paul as servants of this gospel.

I close with a Prayer from the great theologian/scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way
to something unknown, something new.
Yet it is the law of all progress that is made
by passing through some stages of instability
and that may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.
Let them shape themselves without undue haste.
Do not try to force them on
as though you could be today what time
-- that is to say, grace --
and circumstances
-- acting on your own good will --
will make you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new Spirit
gradually forming in you will be.*

*Give God the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.
Above all, trust in the slow work of God,
our loving vine-dresser.*

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Come, Drink of Living Water

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Come drink of living water, never thirst again.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili:

Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,
come, bring your burdens to God,
Come, bring your burdens to God
for Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(Peter Christian Lutkin, Messiah College Concert Choir, Linda L. Tedford)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you.

And give you peace (repeat)

The Lord makes his face to shine upon you and be gracious, and be gracious unto you. And be gracious. The Lord be gracious. Gracious unto you. Amen.