

Central Baptist Church  
Easter Ministry 2023  
Colossians 1:15-20

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## **A HYMN TO THE RISEN CHRIST**

### **By Tom Cowan**

**(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01 as Tom walks up)** Last Sunday morning I introduced you to a new hymn called a hymn for the Resurrection – Philippians 2:5-11 – a tremendous passage which was very probably a hymn sung by our early brothers and sisters.

I remember when Harriet and I first visited Canada in 1967 and we stood beside the roar of Niagara Falls. You have to wonder where all the water keeps coming from.

Or – I recall on our first time in Jerusalem – we were up early in the morning in our hotel on top of the Mount of Olives – and as the sun rose – the golden orb of the mosque called The Dome of the Rock seemed to light up – and the rising sun touched the sandstone walls of the city turning them a rich golden brown. It was simply breath-taking!

This is how we should feel before the passage that we will read – Colossians 1:15-20. We are standing in front of a passage / a truth that has been the basis of our understanding of Christ for 2,000 years. It was there before we were – and it will still stand after we are gone. Its depths should simply overwhelm us – the most we will ever be able to do is to paddle in its shallows.

STAND – READER UP

**(SHOW SLIDE 02)** 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

**(SHOW SLIDE 03)** 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.

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Is there a toehold into this passage that will enable us to catch a glimpse of its depth and wonder? I suggest to you that the best toehold we can use to find our way into the incredible passage lies in verse 19.

**(SHOW SLIDE 04)** 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

The letter to the Colossians was written to challenge an early heresy known as Gnosticism – from the Greek word gnosis – meaning knowledge. Gnosticism was essentially dualistic – it saw life as either spiritual or physical – heavenly or earthly – and these two worlds really could never meet.

Gnosticism taught that what was spiritual was pure – what was earthly was fallen. So how could a god relate to something as earthly as creation?

Their answer was that there was a series of rays or steps emanating from God – each one becoming a little less spiritual – becoming a little more fallen – each one becoming less divine and more human until eventually there was nothing of the divine left.

They also taught that the task and the struggle of humanity was to become like God – and this was to be achieved by climbing up some spiritual ladder – each step requiring special knowledge and higher illumination. It sounds a lot like the teaching of some cults – you have to gain a little more knowledge – moving upward step by step.

This is what Paul is challenging in Colossians and especially in verse 19 when he says that Christ is the fullness of God. There is not a series of spiritual steps bringing God to us – nor is there a spiritual ladder to be climbed rung by rung bringing us to God. Rather the fullness of God resides in a single step – - actually in a single person who is Jesus. The way to reach God also through a person – whose name is Jesus. In Jesus, God has placed the fullness of all that He is.

As we sing this tremendous hymn of praise – we find 4 profound statements about this Risen Jesus.

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**(SHOW SLIDE 05) ONLY IN THE RISEN CHRIST CAN WE FULLY KNOW GOD.**

15 He is the image of the invisible God,

Christ is the image – Greek word is eikon – of the invisible God. We will come back to that word eikon.

A key truth in the spiritual life is the truth of REVELATION.

God is at work making Himself known to us – he is not playing some cosmic game of hide and seek.

**(SHOW SLIDE 06)**

1. In Creation:

This is what we find in the opening chapters of Genesis. I do not see the opening of Genesis – which all about creation – as a geological or scientific textbook. I have a feeling that we try to find and prove things out of Genesis chapter 1 that are not there. It is essentially a theological picture – God creates. We see this reflected in Psalm 19 – the heavens declare the glory of God.

**(SHOW SLIDE 07)** Romans 1:20 –

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,

In creation we see the order, the power and the majesty of God. Creation is the landscape of the Bible. It is the canvas upon which God has drawn a picture of Himself for us to see.

**(SHOW SLIDE 08)**

2. God reveals himself through His Word.

The Bible is a transcript of the thoughts and mind of God – this is how He thinks and so it records how He has acted in history and in the lives of people.

We need to ask for a spirit of revelation as we read the Bible.

**(SHOW SLIDE 09)**

3. God reveals Himself to us in the world through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

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Christ is the image of God; the Greek word is *eikon* – it can mean a picture, a photograph. We have taken the word *eikon* and gathered it into computer language. It is that tiny thumbnail picture or logo that when you click on it and it opens up – takes you into a larger program or file. So when you click onto the life of Jesus – it opens up and takes you into a larger picture – which is the person of God the Father.

That is why John – who wrote his Gospel to challenge this same Gnostic heresy – says to us about the life of Jesus.

**(SHOW SLIDE 10)** 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

18 No one has ever seen God, but the One and Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (Greek = exegeted God)

Jesus says to his disciples and to us – (John 14) - if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

The point is that the only way we can fully know God is through Jesus Christ – because God sent him into the world to reveal who He was.

So when people say that love nature because that is where they can be close to God – they are really missing the point – They can only come close to God in the life of Jesus. If we truly desire to know God as fully as we can, then we cannot do that apart from knowing who Jesus Christ is.

**(SHOW SLIDE 11) ONLY IN THE RISEN CHRIST CAN WE FULLY UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORLD.**

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Some people today believe in a **worldless God** – a god who has withdrawn and distanced Himself from our lives – even from creation. We have been abandoned – we are little more than cosmic orphans.

Or –

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Others only see a **godless world**. Instead of the cosmos (which means order) we live in the midst of CHAOS – so we live like spiritual terrorists in moral anarchy and environmental catastrophe.

This great hymn to Christ presents a powerful picture of Christ as Lord of creation – a dimension that evangelicals often ignore. Jesus is the creative force in creation.

We do not think deeply enough about this. Christ is the agent of creation. Too often we see the world either as our larder (where we gather and hunt for our food) or it is our sports arena (where we play – golf, fish, hunt, ski).

Jesus is also the cohesive force of creation – not only does he create – His word is the glue that hold everything together. He is the cohesive force and power of everything. We need to value and appreciate this far, far more than we usually do as Christians.

Cosmos means that there is order in the universe – the law of gravity works all the time – every time. You do not have to believe in the law of gravity if you don't want to – it does not matter – it is bigger than you are.

Creation is orderly – but it is also free. We are free to pollute the streams and the air with toxic waste – but in that freedom we have to accept the responsibility for what we have done. We are also free to reverse some of what we have done – and once again we can enjoy clean air and water. Jesus is also the culmination/climax of what creation is all about. Colossians says that all things have been created for him. Jesus is the clue to what creation is all about – in the environmental movement we are more than saving the earth for the next generation – we are working on creation because of its relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord of creation.

I sense that many Christians disregard and write off the issues and concerns of the environmental movement – their attitude is – *this world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through*. When we take this attitude, we are little better than the Gnostics dualists that Paul was challenging.

Perhaps as Christians we have a lot of hard thinking to do with regard to the environment.

**(SHOW SLIDE 12) ONLY UNDER THE RISEN CHRIST CAN WE FULLY BE GOD'S PEOPLE.**

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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.

Paul is fond of using the analogy of a human body to describe the Church – Christ is the Head – we are all different limbs and parts of the body.

It reminds us that the Church as the Body of Christ is a living organism in which each member – each person – is uniquely and spiritually linked together through Christ. We are supernaturally and spiritually linked together by Jesus who is the Head of the Body.

Ask you to listen carefully to this next thought -- Baptist churches often state that they are a democracy as opposed to being ruled by a one person such as a bishop – I am not in any way challenging that -- but if we want to understand the church as it truly is – the church is not really a democracy – it must go far beyond meetings, debate and votes, carefully following Roberts Rules of Order. Our problem is that we assume we can bring our secular practice of democracy – with lobbying, politicking, voting – as a way to do the spiritual business of the church. The church is truly a Christocracy – where Christ rules.

The real direction for the church truly must come from Christ as the Head – it does not come from one person – rather it comes from listening together – praying together – discussing together as the people of God about what we sense that the Head/Christ is saying to the Body. A church business meeting should be in the truest sense – a prayer meeting where we come to hear God together. The church is not a democracy (the rule of the people) – the church really is to become a Christocracy – meeting under the rule of Christ and where His word is final.

Here is the picture from the church at Antioch –

**(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Acts 13

1. In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

In worship they heard what the Spirit said to them.

It says that they fasted. We always think of this in terms of food. Remember that when they decided to fast – a great amount of their daily work – gathering food – was

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no longer required. They did not stop at Thriftys or wherever on the way home. What if we thought of fasting on a wider scale. We often say that we would read the Bible more and pray more if we only had more time.

What if there was a really urgent need or crisis facing Central Baptist Church – or an important decision – and we said together we would fast for a week of television – would have to give up Jeopardy or perhaps the sports -- or the newspapers – what if we fasted from our cell phones -- and we would use that redeemed time to come together to listen together to what the Lord of the church was seeking to say to us as a Church.

What if the issue before a church was selecting a new Lead Pastor?

When the risen Christ is not the head of the Church in a real functioning sense – then people do whatever they want – and what we have is spiritual chaos – spiritual anarchy. It is the Headship of Jesus in a church which turns us from chaos into cosmos – spiritual order. It is Jesus alone who stands as the true leader of the church – He is the real moderator – he is the one who directs its work – he through His Word is the one who rules on disputes.

I fully understand that no human church structure is perfect no matter what it is – each different organization has its strengths and weaknesses – but what is important is that when come together as a church – especially at a business meeting – we are not there to do human business in a human way – we are there to do spiritual business in a spiritual way – which means to seek and to hear the instructions of Jesus and take orders from our Head who is Jesus.

The church is also the primary means through which God will seek to accomplish his mission in the world. The direction of that mission comes from Jesus Christ operating and functioning as the Head of the Body.

This is what we see in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12.

Notice how the Trinity is involved in the life and ministry of the church.

**(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Verse 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

The Spirit gives the gifts (charismata) We need to know that in the proper sense of the word – we are a charismatic church – which has nothing to do with how high we raise our hands – or people speak in tongues -- it means that we believe that every Christian is a person gifted by the Holy Spirit.

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**(SHOW SLIDE 15)** Verse 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

The Lord (Jesus as the Head) directs where these gifts are to be used in the church. There are different places and areas of service (diakonia – we are all deacons; all called to serve)

**(SHOW SLIDE 16)** 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

God the Father is the one who energizes them – makes them effective.

**(SHOW SLIDE 17)** 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

This is all summed up – this is all for the common good. The church is not where we engage in our personal hobbies – it is where we work together for a single common purpose.

**(SHOW SLIDE 18) ONLY THROUGH THE RISEN CHRIST CAN WE FULLY UNDERSTAND GOD’S PEACE.**

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.

We live in a province and in a time when there are constant struggles in labour -- whether it is the ferry system – or the medical profession – or bus drivers - Then a year or two later they are back again at the bargaining table – trying to solve the same problem all over again.

When Jesus Christ came into the world – he did not come to arbitrate – he came to mediate – that means he came to stand in the middle – to take the pressure from both sides and to absorb it in himself – in his own body.

He did not get up and leave the bargaining table when the parties were too far apart – he stood in the middle and filled the gap with Himself. Paul says he came to reconcile and bring peace.

**(SHOW SLIDE 19)** 2 Cor 5.



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18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There are 4 levels of reconciliation we need to enter in to. **(SHOW SLIDE 20)**

To God

To ourselves

To one another

To our world

The cross is the only answer to our cosmic rebellion against God. Peace does not come from a negotiated settlement – peace in our lives – comes only from surrender to the one who alone is Lord of Heaven and Earth.

In an age of space exploration – nuclear technology – stem cell research – the problems of life still seem to be insurmountable and insoluble – we are tempted to throw up our hands and admit moral failure and spiritual defeat – only a truly cosmic Christ can bring us what we need – one who can bring cosmos out of our chaos.

Where do we start?

As always we can begin in the microcosm of our own lives – our homes. Perhaps your life is in some dark mess just as the world was in chaos before God stepped in – and you need to ask him to speak a word into your life that will light out of the darkness and bring cosmos out of the chaos – perhaps something in your life or marriage is coming apart at the seams – and you need to ask Christ to come and be the glue that will hold everything together – perhaps your inner life is full of strife – a war is waging inside you – and you need to ask Christ to speak His word of peace and bring things and you under control. Perhaps you need to lay something down at the foot of the cross.

When a church is starting to feel the storms of some chaos – then it needs to turn to the word of Christ and find peace in submission to His word.

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We believe that He does all of that and more – because He and he alone is the Lord of Heaven and earth – he and he alone is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

So this Easter season - we join with one of the great hymns of the Church in praise to this Jesus.

**STAND / WORSHIP TEAM UP**

**(SHOW SLIDE 20)** 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

**(SHOW SLIDE 21)** 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.