

Sermon: Jesus – God and man

Colossians 1:15-29

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As Christians we can make a big fuss over having the right theology about God and Jesus – and we have good reasons to do so. Our faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the heart of our faith; our belief that Jesus Christ was and is at the same time fully God and fully man, is something we stand for. Take this out of our Christian faith and you rip our heart out.

In a complicated but very important part of his letter to the Colossians, St Paul wrote about these issues; let us listen carefully to the importance of our faith in the Trinity and our belief in the deity and humanity of Jesus. It has direct impact on how we view the world around us, and how we view the church, even how we look at ourselves.

God and man

Paul presents Jesus as fully God and fully man. First, he underlines his divinity, by calling Jesus the ‘image of the invisible God’, in Col 1:15. The word image is EIKOON in Greek. Jesus is the true *portrait* of God. God is invisible, but Jesus made him visible, because he is God’s perfect image.

An image can be a representation; a photo of you represents you. If I see your photo on Facebook, I am reminded of who you are. In that sense, Jesus is the image of God. When we look at him, we are reminded of God.

This is not the same as the many reminders we see of God along the highways of Egypt. On the road to Suez you see many signs, saying *Azkourou Allah*, think of God. By the way at the moment there are many more road signs there saying: *Masr Awwalan*, Egypt first, and the army and the people are one hand...

Jesus reminds us of God, not just because he points us to God, as a signpost. He reminds us of God because He is God himself. Paul says in Col 1:19 that “the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Him”.

Jesus is not only a pointer to God, as a good photo – but he is also God himself and that is exactly why he is the best, the perfect pointer to God. Jesus is not a sketch of God, or a good summary of who God is. He is not like a lifeless photo. The fullness of God lives in him! That

means, whatever God is, is in Jesus. God is Creator, God sustains our world; God is the Redeemer; God will come and restore paradise. God is all that, and all that is in Jesus. He is fully God. Nothing of God is left out.

A prophet points to God; Jesus is God. Any prophet after the coming of Jesus who does not point to God in Jesus, must therefore be mistaken, to say it kindly.

This issue is so important, Paul repeats the same idea in Col 2:9: “In [Jesus Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” All of God, nothing excluded, is in Jesus. “The whole fullness of deity.”

In our context in Egypt, where the deity of Jesus is denied by most, it is good to underline this fact. The people who knew Jesus best, his own followers, recognized that God was fully incarnate in Jesus. They could not deny it, and they were prepared to die for it. Our Lord Jesus is God.

But Paul says: the fullness of God “dwells in him bodily.” Jesus also had a real body; he was a real man. God fully dwelt in the full humanity of Jesus.

In our context, this is something a bit easier to undervalue.

The reason why Paul stresses the humanity in his letter to the Colossians, is because in those days, many believed that God was so distant from normal people, from this world in which we live, that he could not reveal himself in a normal person. They believed Jesus was only divine, not human, and they said things like: ‘when Jesus walked on earth, he did not leave footsteps.’ This movement of thinking was called gnosticism.

But Jesus was a real man. He had hands, and feet, he needed food, he became tired. He had to sleep. You could touch him. And he touched people. He was also really tempted to sin. Just like you and I. He did not fall into sin, but he was tempted. He had the same feelings of disappointment, and happiness that we have. He laughed and he cried.

Okay... but what importance does this have? Let me just focus on a few aspects.

Creation

To begin with, St Paul speaks of Jesus begin the Creator of all things. Col 1:16 says, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

Everything on earth and everything in heaven is made by him. What does this mean? Everything? It means, *in heaven* there is nothing that he did not create. All ranks of angels were created by Jesus.

In the days of Jesus, the Jews had a complicated system of ranking angels, called “thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; Paul says, all angelic beings, everything in the invisible world, is created by Jesus Christ.

But also everything visible is made by him. All things on this earth. It means every mountain. Every rock. Every bird. Every plant. Every tree. Every human being.

If Jesus created all this, it must be incredibly important. All things around us are made by our Lord and we can therefore never say that they are not important. But do we really care? It seems that as Christians we often care more for Gods invisible world – and that we call spiritual – and we do not care so much for his earth – for what is visible. As if that is less spiritual.

How do we treat nature? Do we care to plant a tree? Do we take care of the little nature we have here in Egypt? God made it –so you have a personal responsibility to care for what God made. Teach your kids to be careful with nature. Teach them to love everything God made. Teach yourself to be interested in all that God made.

Jesus made all human beings as well. All of them. So how can we do anything less than respect and love all humans as his creatures.

And this creative act was not a one-off thing. Paul writes that “in Jesus, all things are held together.” (Col 1:17b). Even now, He is personally making sure that this universe does not fall apart. He daily sustains all of creation – the mountains, the sun, the animals, plants, humans...

He is the Great Conservationist: He conserves everything that exists. If this divine work would cease for a second, the universe would be back to square one: to the nothingness of the second before creation.

So when you see a plant – know that only thanks to the personal involvement of God it exists, grows, it dies.

Do not think of your own body as just an unimportant envelop for your important spirit. Both are Gods creation, your body and your mind. And psychologists can tell you that we really cannot separate them. So enjoy your body as Gods beautiful creation. Enjoy his ongoing care for it. And treat it as a precious gift of God.

Why do we as Christian so often think this world is not important? Sure – I know – the bible often speaks bad about the world – but that is not about this world as created by God, but about the sinful human systems we have created. God loves this world. He made it through Jesus Christ.

And yes, sin entered into the world, but why did Jesus come? Paul says in Col 1:20 that through Jesus and his physical crucifixion, God made peace because he wants to reconcile to himself all things. All things. Humnaity, but also all other parts of creation.

Jesus is really God and really human. His real humanity tells us that creation is good. It is made by God, held together by him, and it is precious to God.

God made this lovely creation, it is his, and in Jesus He became part of it. And God desires that all creation, even today, will be for his honor and glory.

In Col 1:16, Paul says that not only were all things created by Jesus Christ, but they were also created for Him. Creation exists for him, for his glory and joy. So let us treat all of life, all of nature, all things, as things that exist for the glory of God.

Church

God desires that all things are reconciled to him, that is why Jesus came to give his life and to rise again. He rose in a body. Yes, a new body, but strangely, still physical, visible and tangible.

And when he went with that risen body back to his Father, he left another body on earth – the church. Paul says in Col 1:18 that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the Church. He created this new community; the fullness of God dwells in it, in this complete man - the body of Christ.

It would be very wrong to see the church as mostly an invisible, spiritual entity, as some Christians do. They seem to make the same mistake as those gnostics in the time of Paul, who did not think the physical side of life could be important.

We come across many Christian who define the church in such a spiritual and perfect manner, that you would think that all the normal things of church are not important.

For them it is all about the heart, the motivational side, the inner relationship with God. As if structure, organization, social care, buildings, community life, are of lesser importance.

I often hear muslims who are abhorred by the Muslim Brotherhood and its Islam, say that “this is not true Islam”. Just as we hear Christian say the same about the aberrations of the church. I think those Christians are wrong. The body of Christ is all of us, all churches, with our warts and wrinkles. God dwells through our head, Jesus Christ, in this reality. Divided, often mistaken, less than perfect, but the body of Christ...

It is the community of believers with all their ups and downs and good and bad, with all of their whole social life.

Our head is Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man. Paul describes his mission in Col 1:27 – To you, believers, “God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ in you – plural. That is all of you, the church. The head is Christ, and through Him, the life of God exists in our midst.

In our midst – not in the midst of a sort of idealistic perfectly spiritual community – but in our midst as we are. In the midst of all the faults; of all the ugliness; of all the mistakes of Church. God is here, because Christ, the head of the church, is here through his spirit.

This means, among other things, that you do not have to become a better person in order to

qualify for the presence of God. He is in our midst; he is with you, as you are, normal human being. You do not have to kill your body, destroy your humanity, be a desert monk, before God is with you. He is with us now. As we are. This is the church. We are his body. He is in our midst.

Yes, God wants us to be blameless; He wants us to be holy and righteous. But that is not the precondition for him to be with us. It is the result of God being with us. If we continue in the faith, this is what Jesus Christ will do for us. He will present us, one day, fully perfect to his Father.

Conclusion

For now, we are very imperfect, but still, his church. His body. And we have a task. Not as super spiritual people, but as the people that we are. The task of working with God for reconciling all things to him.

That is a task of evangelism and mission – to tell other of the good news.

But it is also a task of taking care of all people with love and compassion. God loves his world, he loves the people, and he wants us to be his hands of love for this world.

And it is a task of caring for all of nature, for our whole city, for this land, for the world - just because God also loves it.

He desires this city, and this land, all people, to be reconciled to Him. Let us therefore as the tangible, visible very imperfect body of Christ – who is truly God and truly man – be his tangible hands, and feet, and mouth, and heart today. And God is with us.

Amen