

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
May 28 & 29, 2016
Laura Crosby
Who Before Do
Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9-15**

For those of you who are new here, I'm Laura Crosby, and that was my husband John, the Senior Pastor, doing the Children's Sermon. He is very kind to have encouraged us to switch places; I'm usually doing the Children's Sermon, so I'm very grateful to be speaking today. But I have to tell you, he loves doing the Children's Sermon. People think of me as being the creative one, but he really gets into being creative and communicating with the kids. Maybe some of you have heard the old story of a Children's Sermon where the pastor got the kids to sit on the step, just like John did, and he said to them, "Ok kids, what is brown and furry and eats nuts?" And the kids kind of looked at each other, and finally one of them raised his hand a little bit. The pastor called on him and the little boy said, "Well, I know you want us to say Jesus, but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me!" I just want to say that this morning, it **is** all about Jesus...no matter what...the answer is Jesus. That's what this sermon is about.

Last weekend John started introducing this series on Colossians, and he reminded us that Colossians is a letter written by Paul, who is in jail in Rome—not great circumstances—but he is writing this letter to the church at Colossae to encourage them and to make sure that they aren't getting sucked into any heresies. Actually, the church at Colossae was planted by Epaphras. Paul had been in Ephesus, had met Epaphras, had disciplined him, and had sent him out. Epaphras started this new little church in Colossae, so these are new believers...they don't know about Jesus and they need to learn about Jesus and God, so Paul is writing to them. It's not a church he has been to, but he feels like it's his church, kind of, so he is writing to encourage them and correct them and teach them, ok?

This morning we are going to be looking at Colossians 1:15-20, and before we get there, I want to say that this passage is more about *who* than about *do*, and that's not really my jam; I was not real excited about this passage, but God has used it and I really hope that together we will get excited about it in this time. I am one that likes a "charge the hill" kind of sermon, but in this passage I felt like God was saying to me, *we need to know who, before we do*. So, please take out the pew Bibles, turn to page 1753, and grab a pen or pencil too. This is Colossians 1:15-20. And while you are looking for that, many of you may already know this, but if you have trouble finding all those letters at the back of your Bible, a good little thing to help you remember them is: **Go Eat PopCorn**...Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Now, we are going to read this passage, and please keep your Bibles open because we are going to use them, but

as we read this together, I would encourage you to read it from the screen because in every place the text says *He* or *Him*, I have put in *Jesus*. That is who Paul is referring to, and I really want that to be emphasized to us. As we read, I would also ask you to look for repeated words or phrases, because as we interpret God's word, that's another thing that helps us. So, let's read together, starting with verse 15:

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him (Jesus) 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 (Jesus) and for him (Jesus). ¹⁷ He (Jesus) is before all things, and in him (Jesus) all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church; he (Jesus) is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he (Jesus) might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), ²⁰ and through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his (Jesus') blood, shed on the cross. [Colossians 1:15-20]

So, who is it about? Jesus, absolutely! And, what are the words that are repeated? "All things". In your pew Bibles, you can underline "all things". All things...Jesus made all things. His supremacy is all-encompassing; He is the center of everything. This is about Jesus and all things being made for and through Him. So, Jesus is our *who*, and today we want to look at three characteristics of our *who* and why they are important.

First, I want to give you a little quiz. If I show you this, [image shown on screen] what is that an icon for? Facebook. And if you see this? [Another image shown] Google maps. And if you see this? [Third image shown] Jesus. This is an icon, but the very first thing it says in this passage is that Jesus is an icon for God. Jesus is our icon, the image of the invisible God. The people that Paul was talking to didn't know about Jesus; they needed to learn. Paul, in Colossians 1:15 (from *The Message*) says: "We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen."

There's a story of a little girl who was drawing something, and her teacher came up behind her, looking over her shoulder, and she said, "What are you drawing?" The little girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." So the teacher said, "Well, nobody knows what God looks like." The girl responded, "Well they will when I'm done." So I asked my friend Daisy, who is six years old, to draw me a picture of God, and this is what she drew. She was brilliant, right? She knew that if you want to see God, you look at Jesus. Colossians isn't the only place that we see this—just a couple of other quick places, and this is important—in John 14:9 it says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" and John 10:30: "I and the Father are one." So, if we look at Jesus we see God, but so what? Why is that so important? Why is that a big deal? I think there are a lot of reasons, but I think one of them is it prevents us from making God in our image. We tend to project on to God our feelings, our experiences...and for example, a lot of times we can come up with distorted images of God. Say for example, you have a father who was very shaming or dismissive or rejecting, and your experience, without Jesus as a

corrective, may cause you to think that God is shaming or dismissive or rejecting. And He's not. When we hold up our experience or our feelings to the picture of Jesus, we see that Jesus loved, He included, He honored women, He drew to Him sinners and said *I love you still*. So, Jesus keeps our view of God in check. Let's look again at the Bible at some repeated words in verses 15 through 17. It says,

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. [Colossians 1:15-17]

So the second characteristic of our "who" is that we see He is our creator and sustainer. If you want to underline the words "created" and "creation" in your pew Bibles, go for it. But God didn't just make everything, He holds everything together. We aren't meant to hold things together; we are meant to be dependent on God.

So, why is this important? Notice what Paul includes on the list of what Jesus created. He says He created thrones, powers, rulers, authorities. When Colossians was written, Caesar's image was everywhere. Caesar was seen as Lord, as God. There was a temple built to him, there were songs written about him. They had the misconception that Caesar was Lord, and Paul wanted to make sure that these Colossians knew that no, all of these rulers, including Caesar, are under the dominion of God. Now, I wonder if Paul was here today, what might he have to say about our presidential election? I'm just guessing, but I think he might say, *You guys, you are so worried, you are so stressed, you are so afraid that if the wrong person is elected the world will end, or if the right person isn't elected, the world will end. You are focusing on the wrong thing. You are putting your faith in political systems instead of putting your faith in God.*

Jesus is who we need to focus on. I like this quote by Andy Stanley. He says, "Governments matter, policies matter, but neither of those matter as much as men and women who understand that God keeps His promises and that nothing can thwart the plans of God." We need to get involved in the political process. I mean, we need to be informed, we need to vote, but we need to not put our faith in the people we vote for. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. You know, when I was in college, I was a newer believer and I remember being taught the importance of priorities in terms of Jesus being our priority. And I remember being taught that it needed to be God first, then family, then school or work, and then recreation. But as I have grown and as I was looking at this part of this passage of scripture, it seems clear to me that this is a little bit off, because if we make a list of our priorities, we are segmenting or separating out our faith from the rest of our lives; we are compartmentalizing Jesus. So, what if instead of Jesus and then my family, Jesus *in* my family? Instead of Jesus and then my work, Jesus in the center of my work, integrated into all that I do? Not Jesus and then recreation, but Jesus *in* my recreation? What if Jesus was the center? Yes, He's the first, but He's the center; He's integrated into all of our lives. What if Jesus is the writer, the director, the main character of my whole life story?

So, we have looked at our who being our icon, our who being our creator and sustainer, and then third, and this is so important, Jesus is our reconciler.

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. [Colossians 1:19-20]

This is the heart of the gospel. Paul is putting in what we need to know about the gospel here. We are separated from God through the sin in our lives. God desires us to be in relationship with Him forever, and so God sent Jesus to take the penalty for our sin so that we could be reconciled to God and live with Him forever. In this passage, in addition to saying that we were reconciled, verse 20 says that Jesus was our sin sacrifice, making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. And in Colossians 2:13 it says,

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

And then Paul sums it up beautifully in Chapter 2. I'm going to read from The Message. It says,

¹³ God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, ¹⁴ that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets. [Colossians 2:13-14]

Now the error that Paul is correcting here is that the Colossians, like all of us, are tempted to be doers and to add rules and regulations to the gospel. This is about grace; this is a free gift that God has offered to us through Jesus Christ. To emphasize this, let me say that there is nothing good you can do today that can make God love you any more than He already does. And there's nothing bad you can go out and do today that can make God love you any less than He already does. Eugene Peterson says that the message of the American church is, "You can do it, but the message of the Bible is: He's done it." So this passage is really more about "who" than "do", but there are two little things that you can do. If you have been looking at Jesus, but haven't accepted Him as your savior, that is something you can do. And it is so simple. All you have to do is pray. Say, *Lord, I recognize I'm separated from you. I need your forgiveness through Jesus. I want to follow You and live with You for all of eternity. Will you forgive me? Will you be the leader of my life?* That prayer is so simple, but it is life-changing, and so if you are in that boat today, I would invite you to consider doing that.

Like I said, I really want a sermon that is a "charge the hill" sort of thing, but as I was reading this, as I was studying it, I felt like God said to me *Laura! Stand down. Relax. I want you to enjoy me, to rest in my grace.* Those of us who have been believers for a long time, we may skip over all of this, but I believe God wants us to be reignited in our

first love and to truly enjoy God. It makes me think of the Westminster Catechism that says the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. So, what if our “do” for today was to enjoy God? How do you do that? How do you enjoy Jesus? Well, I think first of all you have to get to know Him in His word to enjoy Him, but then beyond that, I think we are all wired uniquely and we connect with God in different ways. So, for some of you, you may feel like your greatest enjoyment of Jesus comes when you are gathered here worshipping, or singing worship songs in your car, or reading a psalm. Others of you may feel like you are enjoying God the most when you are in silence or solitude. Others connect with God when they are serving. Others when they are out in creation. But the more we enjoy God, I think the more we glorify God.

I want to close with a story that I hope will give you an image that will stick with you and help you to enjoy God. Every year in May, John has a board meeting that is outside London, and I get to go with him, so...nice perk for me! This year we added on a couple of days and we went down to Hastings. Have any of you ever seen Foyle’s War...it’s a BBC...ok! So, Foyle’s War is filmed in Hastings and we wanted to go stay there. So we went there and when I talked to John about this he’s like *Oh, that’s so great! There’s a great battlefield right near there. We have to go see it!* And I’m like *whoo whoo, a battlefield...*not exactly my thing. Well, it turns out this is kind of a big deal...in 1066 the Battle of Hastings took place there. So, we went and we did the audio tour and we did the video and everything, it was fascinating. Well, it turns out that back in 1066, there was this British king, King Harold, and he was a new king who had kind of gotten his kingship by not kosher means. Then, there was William the Conqueror in France. His name kind of gives away who won this battle...William the Conqueror. So we have William the Conqueror in France and we have King Harold in Britain, and both of these guys wanted to be boss of the island. So William attacks. He comes and he’s trying to take over the kingship in England. He comes and the British soldiers were up where there is an abbey and a school now—they had the high ground, and the French soldiers were in the low ground. So this is a really intense battle over a long period of time, and they are fighting and fighting...well, partway through the battle, some of the French soldiers hear the rumor that William has been killed. That causes them to lose heart, and some of the soldiers at one end of the line start to retreat because they are so discouraged. William gets wind of this, and he gallops his horse over, he lifts his mask and he says, “No! I’m alive. Take heart. Victory is ahead of you; only death is behind you!”

I love that picture. I think of God lifting His mask and showing us Himself through Jesus. I think of all the times when we may have felt discouraged or disheartened in the battle, overwhelmed or lonely. We forget who we are, or whose we are. But every time we open our Bible this week, God lifts His mask and shows us Himself in Jesus. He has been here, He has fought this battle, He knows what it feels like...and, like William, He says, “Take heart. Victory is ahead of you. Only death is behind you.”

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and we thank you. We pray that You would reignite our love and excitement for you in this passage of scripture, where we see all of who you are in Jesus. We pray Lord, that you might draw to Yourself those who haven’t

yet come to accept you. And we pray that we might model Your love to all those we meet this week. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.