

Finding Hope in a Cross

Colossians 1:15-20
Hebrews 12:1-3

September 16, 2018

Today we have the second of a four part series of presentations about this church's logo, which is, in reality, a visual form of our mission statement. It's out there on our building, big enough for everyone traveling Ten Mile to see. It's on our stationery, our newsletter and our weekly bulletin. It's deceptively simple, which all good logos should be, but in reality is full of wonderful symbolism. All four parts of our mission statement are there:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

Today is the cross, right in the center, the heart of the whole thing. You'll see it in today's bulletin.

With four arms of equal length, instead of the design we're accustomed to, this one is called a Greek cross. In some Christian traditions it's very common, and has been in use since the fourth century.

It's at the center of our logo. It's the heart of life itself. It's Jesus.

Listen to this from our [Book of Common Worship](#):

“As the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, Christ is the center of the universe, the ruler of all history, the judge of all people. In Christ all things began, and in Christ all things will be fulfilled. In the end, Christ will triumph over the forces of evil.

“As sovereign ruler, Christ calls us to a loyalty that transcends every earthly claim on the human heart. To Christ alone belongs the supreme allegiance in our lives. Christ calls us to stand with those who in every age confessed, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord!’”¹

Yes!

¹ [The Companion to the Book of Common Worship](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/christ-king-reign-christ/), as cited in <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/christ-king-reign-christ/>

To me, one of the most exciting, challenging, and liberating passages in the Bible is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians. To appreciate what's going on here, you need to spend time with this. A quick gloss over will not do it.

Think of homemade chicken soup. You don't get there fast. When Fran makes it, it takes time. Veggies are chopped, chicken prepared, noodles are made, the whole mess gets thrown in the pot with the broth, and then it simmers, hour after hour. The enticing smell takes over the house; you cannot get away from it. And it seems the colder the day, the more drawn you become. Finally, when you think you can stand it no longer, the magnificent, steaming bowl is placed before you.

Learn to treat Scripture that way.

Anticipate
Prepare
Savor
Enjoy
Digest
Reflect

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17, TNIV)

Here are some things you'll discover when you approach Colossians like my wife's chicken soup:

We have an idea that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that was the start of it all. However, when Paul writes, 'in him all things were created,' that suggests something that'll blow the doors right off typical religion.

The Old Testament book of Genesis begins with,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

You line that up with this passage from Colossians and you've got Jesus right there as the agent of creation itself! He may have been born in the flesh a couple thousand

years ago, but as the second person of the Trinity he's been alive from all eternity.

The New Testament book of John opens in a similar way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

Then a little later John tells us that,

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (v. 14)

And Paul writes,

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

Gravity
Electromagnetic force
Higgs boson
Jesus

I referred to that verse a couple years ago when I preached in Guatemala, and I said, if in him all things hold together, then in him you hold together. Then I went up and down the aisle, pointed people out individually, and said, 'in him you hold together.'

So, he's been alive from all eternity. He's the agent of creation and even the glue of the universe. As if all that weren't enough, here's another piece.

Thanks to the cross, when God wants to change the world, instead of sending in tanks, bombers and missiles, he tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who give us a hard time. His allies are the poor in spirit and the meek, and they're the ones that get the kingdom of heaven.

Thanks to the cross, the emblem of Rome's power, the thing that was used to keep people in line, that was a symbol of fear, a cross, is transformed into the pathway to life.

And who ends up on his right and his left? Not the two disciples who wanted to be there, but instead two of the worst criminals of their time. They deserved to die, but even one of them was forgiven on the spot by this innocent man.

You see friends, the kingdom of God is not what we'd expect, and the people who are citizens of it will probably surprise us. We think it belongs to nice people, those who are clean and well behaved, but if the New Testament is correct it'll be filled with corrupt government officials, crack heads and people on the margins of society who nevertheless found their hope in Jesus; the poor in spirit will be there with them along with others who are brave enough to come out from beyond their masks and acknowledge that life as usual is a fraud.

So here's the big question: what's your response? The cross may be at the heart of our logo, but how about your heart?

Listen to this wonderful summation from the book of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)