

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

CHRIST, OUR EVERYTHING Colossians 1:15-28

Many of us here at St. Matthew's speak easily of our faith in Jesus Christ. But I have a question for us to think about. Who is Jesus? It is not a question about who you think Jesus is, or who Jesus is to you, but who he has revealed himself to be through Scripture and by the Holy Spirit through the Church. This is a very important question because if you are in error as to your understanding of Jesus, then you will also be in error when it comes to your faith. Another way of saying this is to ask the question, Can you have faith in something that is not what you think it is?

I am reminded of the seagull in the Disney movie, *The Little Mermaid*, when I think about this question. When Ariel would take an object that she found in a ship wreck to the seagull in order to find out what it was, he would take a look at it and simply make up a name and function for the object on the spot. Although these were usually artifacts of little consequence, like a comb or a fork, just think of the chaos that would have resulted if the seagull had declared that a cannon ball was a flotation device for those who could not swim. Let's take that a bit further and say that on the ship the passengers were told that in case of an accident they were to go on deck and grab one of these flotation devices before jumping overboard. Would their unwavering faith in the cannon ball to save them keep them from drowning? Of course not, they would certainly perish because their faith was misplaced.

Again, I ask, who is this Jesus in whom you have placed your faith? Have you relied on the confident improvisation of the seagull, or do you really know?

How can we really know? We can know who Jesus is because he has revealed his true nature to us in Scripture and that throughout history the Church has gained knowledge of its Head through the experience of doing mission in his name.

Along with the first chapter of John's Gospel and the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews, today's passage from the letter of St. Paul to the Colossians is an amazingly complete summary of who this Jesus really is. Just listen to this catalog of attributes.

- Image of the invisible God
- Firstborn of all creation
- Creator of all things
- Sustainer of all things
- Head of the Church
- The beginning
- Victor over death
- Temple of God
- Reconciler of all things
- High priest
- Our Hope.

As the image of God he is the revelation of God's nature to the world.

Being the firstborn of all creation does not mean that he was created first, for he is uncreated, but rather that he is the primogenitor or heir of all things.

As the Creator, all things were created by him and for him – everything belongs to him.

Jesus as the incarnate Son of God also is the One who keeps all a creation in existence.

The Christ is the head of the Church because it does his work according to his will in this world.

As the Son of God and the Creator, Jesus Christ is the Alpha, the beginning of all things because he is before anything was.

By defeating death through the Resurrection, Jesus lives eternally and therefore is the Omega – the Last.

Because Jesus is the Incarnation of God, he is the physical dwelling place of God, which is God's Temple – the Temple in Jerusalem was no longer needed and has never been rebuilt.

Through his death on the cross of Calvary, Jesus took on our sin and gave us his righteousness so that we through faith in his sacrifice can be reconciled to God – and along with us, all creation.

Jesus is also our High Priest in that he presents the faithful to God.

In addition, Jesus is the promised hope – he is our Savior and through faith in him we can realize the promise of being God's people and God being our God – eternally.

St. Paul's catalog of the attributes of Jesus demonstrates that Jesus is God and there is no other. The Apostle, along with St. John the Evangelist and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, makes clear the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. There is no one else who manifests all these attributes. No man, no angel, not even God the Father. But in addition, there is no one else who fulfills the categories of being divine and human, human and sinless, sinless and sin-bearer, necessary for our salvation. But there is even more. Jesus' importance goes beyond the revelation of God and the salvation of those who believe. St. Paul's catalog of attributes also demonstrates that Jesus is sovereign over every aspect of this life in this world. And because of that he eliminates the dualism between the spiritual and the natural and the sacred and the secular. There is no compartmentalization in the life and ministry of Jesus, so there can be no legitimate compartmentalization in our lives as his followers. As we hear every week from the Letter to the Romans:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Everything we have and everything we are is to be used for the worship and praise of God in Jesus Christ, for it is all subject to Jesus who is sovereign over everything.

Jesus is our life and our death.

Jesus is everything in between.

Jesus is everything beyond.

There is no other security in life.

There is no other meaning in life.

There is no other hope in life...other than Jesus.
Think of these things as you listen to Jesus' words about himself.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7)

In the words of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews:

²but in these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:2-4)

Is this the Jesus in whom you have invested your faith? This Jesus is our everything. Any other is like grasping a cannon ball to keep you afloat in the ocean.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, I believe in you as you have revealed yourself in Scripture and through the experience of the Church. Save me from the error of selecting those attributes of yours that I understand or am comfortable with while ignoring those that are beyond my understanding or are hard for me to accept at this time. Jesus, I want to follow you as the way of life, the way to the Father and the way of ministry. May I not settle for part of you or your shadow, but only with all that you are. Transform my weak faith into a perfect faith in you through your Holy Spirit. And, through that same Spirit empower me to do the work you have called me to do in this world in your name. Amen.

Taken from a sermon preached by the Reverend Charles D. Alley, Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia on July 18, 2010, the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 11, Year C.