

ST.PETER'S MILTON. Sunday 7 February 2021

2nd Sunday before LENT.

THEME: TWO SONGS to HELP US from the EARLY CHURCH.

Bible Readings: Colossians 1: 15 – 20; John 1: 1 – 14

¹¹⁻¹² May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from his glorious power, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience. And with joy give thanks to^[a] the Father, who has made you fit to have your share of **what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light.** ¹³ **He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son,** ¹⁴ by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.

**The Person and Work of Christ. Colossians 1v15-20 GNB
A Hymn from the Early Church about Christ.**

¹⁵ *Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things.* ¹⁶ *For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place.* ¹⁸ *He is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body's life. He is the first-born Son, who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have the first place in all things.* ¹⁹ *For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God.* ²⁰ *Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood^[a] on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.*

²¹ At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought. ²² But now, by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his presence. ²³ You must, of course, continue faithful on a firm and sure foundation... of hope in the gospel...

The Word of Life. John 1v1-18. GNB. An Ancient Hymn or Poem of the early church.

¹ *In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *From the very beginning the Word was with God.* ³ *Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him.* ⁴ *The Word was the source of life,^[a] and this life brought light to people.* ⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.**

⁶ *God sent his messenger, a man named John,* ⁷ *who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe.* ⁸ *He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light.* ⁹ *This was the real light—the light that comes into the world and shines on all people.*

¹⁰ *The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him.* ¹¹ *He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.* ¹² *Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children.* ¹³ *They did not become God's children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father.*

¹⁴ *The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.*

¹⁵ *John spoke about him. He cried out, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'"*

¹⁶ *Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another.* ¹⁷ *God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸ *No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Introduction.

We have been living in dark and difficult days in the UK and throughout the world since the pandemic reached our shores. No place on earth seems to have completely escaped though UK has suffered the most in Europe with now 100k+ deaths and 2million worldwide. However, we need to remember that there have been other plagues and pandemics in the history of mankind – ¼ of Europe died in the Great Plague of the 14th & 15th Centuries and 18m died in the Spanish Flu in 1919, following WWI. We will get through this even if it is still very hard for so many people at present. The example of Captain Tom's life and recent death is one to inspire and help us also.

Our freedom is curbed, many have lost their jobs, their education, their loved ones and even their lives. We cannot deny the pain of loss and grief that this has caused and it is good to acknowledge that grief.

In one interview I heard last week, with reference to Job's comforters, the best thing that we can do to help someone grieving is just to be there. We may not have many words to say except perhaps 'I'm sorry for your loss'. In other times, we could give a hug, but even to just 'be there' with someone in silence can help.

I was touched by the report of people singing during the current Lockdown and seeking to help others thereby. A postman called Nathan Evans has become a Sea Santy singer and touched the world. The Poor Clare nuns from Arundel, Sussex have also touched the world through their calming songs. Their hit CD is called Light for the World. And there was the singing Grandad who has posted over 200 songs on Facebook, as he could not see his grandkids!

So, perhaps songs can help us during these times of sadness and darkness? What songs have you been singing or listening to?

The early church also faced dark and difficult times. It was not easy to be a follower of Christ in those days, with crazy Emperors like Claudius or Nero or Domitian around. The Christians could be blamed for the troubles in the world and they owed their loyalty to another King, so they were suspected of treason. It is hard for Christians in many nations, especially Nigeria at present and for many years also in North Korea. (Open Doors)

Both of our Bible Passages today are thought to be the lyrics of poems or hymns that would be known and sung by the early church. Learning Songs by heart can really help us when we are troubled. They can help us remember the truths about God also. What are they about? In short, they are all about JESUS – who He is and what He has done for us. **His Person and His Work.** His Work was to reconnect us to God, because of the disconnection caused by our foolishness and sinfulness. However, He could only do that because of Who He was.

The Story of the Boy and His Boat/Kite helps to explain the Work of Jesus, as both John 1 and Colossians 1 describe in more detail.

- A boy builds a boat himself from a kit.
- He launches it in a river, but loses it.
- It is found by someone who takes it to a Second hand shop where it is then displayed for sale
- The boy sees it in the shop and eventually saves up money to buy it back.
- He then says 'Little boat – you are Twice Mine. I made you and I bought you.'

The same is true for God's work in Christ. He made us and He bought us back so that we can belong to Him.

We will now look briefly at Colossians 1, which helps us understand more deeply both Who Jesus truly is and also What He has done.

When writing this letter, Paul was in prison in Rome and he had heard from his friend Epaphras, who had founded the church in Colosse, in the province of Asia, what we now call Turkey. It was in the Lycus valley and on a great trading route east-west from Europe to Asia. Paul's purpose in writing was to counter the error of false teachers in the early church who said you needed to have special, secret knowledge and follow certain practises to really know God. (an equivalent today might be the Mormon!). So he taught them the truth about Who Jesus is and What He has done.

- A. **The Person of Christ.** Who He is. He starts by describing Jesus as the IKON or **visible Likeness of the Invisible God.** 'If you want to know what God is like, take a long cool look at Jesus' Billy Graham. Jesus shows us what the Father is like. Philip once asked

Jesus 'Show us the Father!' Jesus replied **'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father'** (John 14v9). So Christ the eternal Son of God, both God and man, reflects and reveals God to us. When Jesus said 'I AM' He was taking God's name! **Firstborn Son** implies one with rights and privileges then as now. He has priority as the FIRST, the Supreme, the Sovereign One. He was also the **Firstborn from the dead** – the first to rise from the dead with a physical body NEVER to die again. He is the FIRST, the HEAD of the church, His body. He is also filled with the **FULNESS of God**. *'For in Christ, all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fulness in Christ'* see Col.2v9 And so 'We are COMPLETE in Him!' song.

B. **The Work of Christ.** There are two aspects of this explained in the Hymn as follows:

- i) **Christ is Supreme in Creation v15-17.** 7 times in 6 verses we read All things, all creation, everything, whole universe. So Christ is supreme over all, even angels bow to Him. Through Christ, God created the world and everything in it. Before all things (v17) also implies that Jesus is truly eternal and was with the Father and the Spirit when the world was made.

Listen to a short extract from CS Lewis' **'Magicians Nephew'** when the Creation of the World is described: p.96,97. **Ch.9 The Founding of Narnia.**

.... The earth was of many colours: they were fresh, hot and vivid. They made you feel excited; until you saw the Singer himself, and then you forgot everything else. It was a Lion. Huge, shaggy, and bright, it stood facing the risen sun. Its mouth was wide open in song and it was about three hundred yards away....

The Lion was pacing to and fro about that empty land and singing his new song. It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle, rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass. It spread out from the Lion like a pool. It ran up the sides of the little hills like a wave. In a few minutes it was creeping up the lower slopes of the distant mountains, making that young world every moment softer. The light wind could now be heard ruffling the

grass. Soon there were other things besides grass. The higher slopes grew dark with heather. Patches of rougher and more bristling green appeared in the valley.... It was a little, spiky thing that threw out dozen of arms and covered these arms with green and grew larger at the rate of about an inch every two seconds. There were dozens of these things all round him now. When they were nearly as tall as himself he saw what they were. 'Trees!' he exclaimed...

Of course, CS Lewis uses the Lion, Aslan as a type of figure for Christ and it is as He spoke out or sung the music, that the World was made. The Apostle John reminds us: **'Through Him (Christ the Word) God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him'** John 1v3

Christ is Supreme in Creation.

- ii) **Christ is Supreme in the New Creation. V.18-20** It is only because of WHO Jesus was and is as both God and Man, that He could become the BRIDGE between a Holy God and sinful Humans. A Bridge needs to reach both sides. He alone can bring us back to God the Father. Through the Son, God brought back or restored everything to Himself (Col.1v20) but we will only see this fully realised at the end of time.

Again, CS Lewis helps us in the Last Battle, to understand this

Chapter 16 'Farewell to Shadowlands'. P.168f *'I see,' she said at last thoughtfully. 'I see now. This garden is like the stable. It is far bigger inside than it was outside.'* *'Of course, Daughter of Eve,' said the Faun, 'The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside. Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all.*

'I see,' she said. 'This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia outside the stable door! I see.... World within world, Narnia within Narnia...'. 'Yes,' said Mr Tumnus, 'like an onion: except that as you go in and in, each circle is larger than the last.' And Lucy looked this way and that and soon found that a new and beautiful thing had happened to her. Whatever she looked at, however far away it might be, once she had

fixed her eyes steadily on it, became quite clear and close as if she were looking through a telescope....

One day, those who have come to know Christ, the Lion of Judah, will be part of the great crowd who live in the Heavenly Country, which has been restored to its original design and purpose.

However, when Adam and Eve sinned, not only harmony between man and God was destroyed but also disorder came to creation. Christ's death on the Cross made peace possible between God and man AND the potential for restoration in the physical world, but only fully when Christ returns. The troubles in the natural world now, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes etc are like the 'birth pains' before a new life is born (Romans 8v22). A renewed heaven and earth will come when Christ returns.

What is separated and apart, can be brought together and near through the blood of Christ shed on the Cross. Our Communion Service reminds us always of this great cost – Broken body and shed blood – the bread and the wine.

So Christ is Supreme in Creation AND the New Creation, Redemption.

Finally, in Conclusion, let me explain it like this. (Visual illustration with hands and a book)

1. God and Humans together in perfect harmony. (Two hands together represent this.)
2. Humans rebel and disobey God, so get disconnected. (Two hands apart with a gap between them. Book is like our sin that causes a barrier between us.)
3. Humans try to reach God but cannot do so, however hard they try. He is beyond our reach, too holy and mighty
4. God saw our situation and sent down His Son to be our Rescuer, to make the Bridge back to the Father. He took our Sin on Himself, died and rose again to remove this barrier.
5. Jesus was both fully God and fully human (John 1v14 & Colossians 1v19). Only so could He be the perfect Bridge between the two.
6. The Bridge was completed by His death upon the Cross, where His blood was shed to make peace and a way back to God the Father

7. Our response is needed in order to pass from Darkness to Light, from Death to Life, from Despair to Hope.
8. How can we do this?

i) Admit that we are cut off, disconnected from the Father. Then Confess and Repent of our sins. We were enemies but can become friends.

ii) Believe that Jesus is the Bridge, the One who died and rose again to reconnect us to God, with sins forgiven. He can TRANSFER us from darkness to light, the dominion of satan to the Kingdom of His Son.

iii) Count the Cost. Realise that it will be hard to follow Jesus, but He will help us and promise to never leave or forsake us.

iv) Do something. Pray to receive Jesus into our hearts and lives, so that we can BECOME God's children, members of His own family.

9. The results are out of this world. Peace with God, sins forgiven, a place in eternity with God. True harmony and shalom. (Hands reunited together.) The Light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out! (John 1v5)

However, Paul challenges his readers to **CONTINUE Faithful** on the sure and firm foundation of hope in this gospel. (Col.1v23) John also writes so that his readers will **CONTINUE to believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and may have life in his name (Jn.20v31).

Prayer Song:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and the things on earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Keep your eyes upon Jesus, let nothing on earth take His place. And for every hour, He will give you power till you come to the end of the race.

Simon Holloway. February 2021