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Eric and I met up with a guy recently to explore some of the initiatives at the church which he leads. We had a great chat and we were excited by the activities that they were involved with. However, he made an intriguing comment at one point that I've not really able to reconcile – he said that many, or most, in the congregation would be uncomfortable with the notion of Jesus as Lord.

Then we come to our Scripture passage for today, which while it doesn't explicitly describe Jesus as "Lord" by using the word or title "Lord," I would argue this passage does in fact, explicitly *describe* Jesus as Lord and establishes the basis for such a claim.

Our text for today is one of the classical statements about Jesus Christ in the Bible. It seems the Colossians had a few issues, and while Paul means to address each one in turn, he wants to start by grounding the Colossians firmly in the basics of the faith – and Christ is the centre of that faith. If the Colossian Christians can grasp the nature and mission of Christ – who He was, and is, and what Christ came to do for them and all creation – then they'll be on a firm footing when it comes to dealing with all of the other problems in play.

The North Star provides us with a good metaphor. Apparently, Northern Hemisphere-based people who navigate by the stars, find the North Star especially helpful. Once they locate the North Star it helps them to orient themselves so that they can recognise where they are and in what direction they're headed. With this knowledge they can avoid dangerous rocks and other known ocean and coastal hazards – and they can guide their ship to its intended destination. In this letter to the Colossians, Paul is flagging for them that Christ *is their* North Star – He's the fixed point in the sky by which they can navigate dependably. He's the truth by which they'll discern what's real and trustworthy from all other competing claims.

It's a pretty amazing description here in Colossians, in these verses Paul proclaims *who* Jesus is, naming Him as supreme in both the created order and the church. Jesus *is* the embodiment of God's saving work.

It's quite the list of qualities that Pauls lists in verses 15-20, Jesus is described as:

- the image of the invisible God
- the firstborn of all creation

- the one in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created
- the one in whom all things hold together
- the head of the church
- the beginning
- the firstborn from the dead
- the one who has first place in everything
- the one in whom the fullness of God dwells
- the one who reconciles all things to God and makes peace

Any one of those counts as quite the credential and could be a sermon on its own. It's meant to pack a punch and leave no space for those who would minimise the person or work of Jesus. Paul is saying that Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is God's creative, saving work in action. Jesus is how we know God.

Jesus' integral role in creation is prominent in these verses and I found that interesting in light of one of our recent Revelation studies. The lesson on chapter four highlighted how in verse 11, it's God's identity and work as creator of all things, as creator of us, which makes Him worthy to "receive glory and honour and power."

¹¹ 'You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.'

Likewise, Jesus, as God, and the one *in* whom, and *for* whom, all things were created is worthy of glory and honour and power.

The idea of offering such esteem, of ascribing worship, devotion...glory, honour, and power can be a bit of a hard sell to moderns and post-moderns, especially in egalitarian New Zealand. We love levelling everybody - and this has its virtues - but if we imagine that we might possibly get carried away with this whole idea of offering worship which is consummate with the worth of Jesus, we've nothing to worry about. It's entirely appropriate and legitimate that we recognise Him as Lord, we can't overstate His goodness, we can't get *too* excited about His love, we can't exaggerate His holiness, or overestimate His power...He's all that and more.

And the thing is, this worthiness of worship has more far-reaching implications than just the enthusiasm of our Sunday worship because of course *all* of our lives is worship. Christ's lordship

doesn't just mean that we only declare His worth in word and song, but that all that we do and all that we are is informed and shaped by the fact that He is not only Lord of all, but He's Lord of me. In chapter 3 of Colossians, verse 17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do *everything* in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

That's kind of intense eh? A bit like Jesus when He challenged His would be disciples saying. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." That's kind of an audacious ask, unless you're the Lord and then it's entirely appropriate.

On the basis of our text this morning Methodist pastor Sandy Wylie gets pretty challenging about the implications for the church, she writes:

Think about this: What would it mean if we Christians took all of our orders from Jesus Christ, if we put ourselves completely at His disposal? Our church programs and budgets would change.

It's not hard to see where Jesus' heart was, to see whom He loved. If Jesus showed up in our city today, we have good ideas as to where He would go. He would go first to those for whom he was most deeply concerned in his earthy life: the poor, the broken, the outcast – and he would surely visit us poor sinners, who need forgiveness and peace. Therefore, we ought to organise our churches to reflect these things. We ought to cling tightly to our Lord. All of our time and resources should be directed to his agenda, not ours."

Our reading this morning boldly declares that Jesus Christ is the one for whom the whole creation was made in the first place. Now this is a pretty heady thing to say about a person of recent history – which Jesus was when the letter to the Colossians was penned. But it's also a remarkable thing to say about the 'natural' world. This planet, humans, animals, plants, stars, galaxies etc. these were Jesus' idea and His workmanship. NT Wright says, "It is beautiful, powerful and sweet because he made it like that. When the lavish and generous beauty of the world makes you catch your breath, remember that it is like that because of Jesus."

The world's value is informed and understood because of who created it and for whom, in the same way our identity as humans is inseparable from who Jesus is and what He has done. Verse 15 of Colossians 1 says that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, and then in verse 18 it says that He is

the firstborn from the dead. This means that Jesus is the blueprint for the genuine humanness which is on offer through the gospel.

My fav theologian NT Wright says on this,

As the head of the body, the church; as the first to rise from the dead; as the one through whose cruel death God has dealt with our sins and brought us peace and reconciliation; and, above all, as the one through whom the new creation has now begun; in all these ways, Jesus is himself the one 'in whom' we are called to discover what true humanness means in practice. We have often settled for second best in our human lives. Jesus summons us to experience the genuine article.

Human notions of lordship tend to be associated with exploitation and the flaunting of power at the expense of the weak. But His lordship, Jesus' lordship leads to our flourishing – indeed that is the point. The point is also, that as our creator and sustainer, He knows best what will lead to our flourishing. To follow Christ is to allow Him to tell me who I am. With so many and varied options of self-discovery and identity creation in our day, the Christian begins with Christ. The One who created us, to love us and be in relationship with us, is more qualified than we even are ourselves, to tell us who we are. And what a relief! What is touted as freedom – the “freedom” to create our own identity - has turned out to be a burden that we weren't meant to bear. And it's my opinion that among many contributing factors it's a key source of the anxiety we see among our precious your people.

The idea that Christ is Lord, it's big...it's not something we can dabble with or relegate to the periphery of our lives. I remember a wee quip from my youth that went, “Lord of all, or not Lord at all.” That's not meant to be a threat but a prompt to consider just who Christ is for each one of us. Today's Scripture reading presents Christ as supreme over all, the rightful Lord of all creation, is He Lord of me? Is He Lord of you? Is He Lord of *us*?