

Season of Creation-Cosmos  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Darryl Thompson Powell  
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This morning as we are in this season of creation and with today's theme of "Cosmos," I want to put a tag on our second lesson and for a moment – with your prayers – I want to talk about "Jesus Christ Preeminent."

Advertisers know that we think bigger is better - especially if it's bigger at a lesser price. For a long time, we were encouraged to "Super-Size" our meals. We don't say it that way anymore thanks to the documentary "Super-Size Me," yet fast food places still ask if you'd like to "upsized" your meal or get a large fry for only 20 cents more. One restaurant chain lures us in with a "buy one, take one" meal offer, while a commercial for allergy relief tell us "Six is greater than one" (as if we didn't learn that in first grade).

The articulate, African, apostle Paul was ever the advertiser. He knew the Colossians needed to remember the greatness of Jesus Christ; so in his letter to them he super-sized Jesus Christ. He painted Jesus with broad strokes to show the Christ as larger than life. Paul reminded the Colossians that in all things, in everything, Jesus Christ is preeminent.

First, Jesus is preeminent because he has a unique relationship to God. Jesus is preeminent because he is the **Image of the Invisible God**. The NRSV translation doesn't quite express what Paul was saying. The Greek word εἰκών is better translated as "mirror-like representation," but that can be even more confusing because everyone knows that invisible things don't reflect in a mirror. Think of it this way: when there's a solar eclipse, the news is quick to tell people not to look directly at the eclipse because it can damage your eyes. So instead you build a pinhole box so that you see the sun without actually looking at it.

The same is true for God. We can't look directly at God, essentially making God invisible to us. But God didn't want to remain invisible. The only way for God to be fully revealed was through Jesus. Paul says that Jesus is the very substance of God, the manifestation of God, created in such a way that people could see God. Jesus is derived from and representative of God.

With Expo Chicago happening this weekend, let me share this old story about two artists. Each was extremely talented and each had their own audiences of followers. Eventually, the decision was made to host a competition to determine which of the two was truly the best. A panel of experts was selected who would serve as the judges. Once and for all, the question of "best" would be put to rest. On the day of the judging, so many people had come to watch that it was decided to hold the contest outdoors. Because of the sun and wind, and perhaps to raise the

suspense just a bit, both paintings were covered with draperies until each was revealed and judged, one at a time. The drapery was removed from the first painting. The judges and the audience gasped as they looked at the image that appeared on the canvas. It was a still life of flowers and fruit. And it looked so real. The colors and the shading were so authentic. In fact, after a few moments, some birds even flew down from the trees and tried to pick the grapes that were painted on the canvas. The crowd cheered as the artist smiled and nodded to the judges who were clearly shaken. Everyone was overcome by the obvious talent of this artist. There was even some discussion as to whether it was even necessary to look at the second painting. But it was decided that they did have to be fair, even if it was a waste of time. The drapery was removed from the second painting. Or at least a judge tried to remove the drapery from the second painting. But as he looked closer, he found that he could not remove the drapery. The drapery covering the second painting was, in fact, the painting itself. As the judges and the audience began to realize what was happening, they grew silent. Then a cheer erupted that echoed through the courtyard. The best artist was selected. One painting looked real enough to fool birds, while the second was so real it had fooled everyone.<sup>i</sup>

Sometimes, we all have trouble picking out the real from the unreal, the true from the untrue, or only partially true. The New Testament declares Jesus is the

real true representation – the mirror-like image – of God even though many are fooled. “He is the image of the invisible God...” But this isn’t the only time the Bible gives that description. Listen to these other text.

Heb. 1:3 - “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being...”

Col. 2:9 - “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...”

John 1 - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...”<sup>ii</sup> Even Jesus said that whoever had seen him had seen the Father.<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus is preeminent because he is the image – the mirror-like reflection – of God. Jesus shows us God. The question is whether or not you believe it.

It’s important to settle this belief question because of what Paul declares next. Paul states that Jesus is preeminent because he is **creator of all**. The next part of our texts can be confusing. Paul states that Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation.” Because we easily talk about firstborn children, some take this to mean that Jesus was created first. That’s not what Paul was trying to say. Too often subtleties get lost in translation. The Greek word that Paul uses here is πρωτότοκος (prōtotokos) and it’s only used in the New Testament about Jesus. It’s the root of our English word “prototype.” Now, we use prototype to describe “the original or model on which something is based or formed.”<sup>iv</sup> But the first century world didn’t

do mass production. Jesus wasn't the first thing God created or the prototype that God based humans on. Paul clarifies this in verse 16: "for by him all things in heaven and on earth were created." In case you haven't figured it out by now, one of my majors was English so I like looking at words and their nuances. The NRSV says "for in him," but the Greek word translated as "in" can also be "by." The Greeks were OK with one word, but for English the two have different implications to understanding the text.

Let me put it like this: Back in 1980, astronomer Carl Sagan had a 13-part miniseries called "Cosmos." I don't remember a lot about it, but one opening sequence has stayed with me for over 30 years. It started with a slow zoom-in on something green. Eventually you realize it's an apple just as someone chops it in half. It then showed highlights of steps in the making of an apple pie. The final scene shows a properly dressed server carrying the pie through a formal British dining hall with long tables and setting it in front of Carl Sagan, who is seated at the head of a formal – and properly set – table. Dr. Sagan looks at the pie then looks at the camera and says, "If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe."

According to Paul, Jesus could make a pie from scratch! Creation belongs to Jesus. Far from just a big bang theory, Paul says that everything that exists was created by Jesus and for Jesus. Jesus once lived on a workshop greater than the one

in Nazareth! What we call the laws of science are really divine laws. Whatever scientists discover and state as true is only something already in existence; it's a principle established by God. Science, for example, didn't create gravity, it only discovered it. Science cannot create out of nothing. John Haldane, a 20<sup>th</sup> century scientist, once suggested to Monsignor Knox that in a universe containing millions of planets it was inevitable that life would appear by chance on one of them. "Sir," said Knox, "If Scotland Yard found a body in your trunk, would you tell them, 'There are millions of trunks in the world - surely one of them must contain a body'? I think they would still want to know who put it there."<sup>v</sup>

As Paul puts it, Jesus made everything there is, material and immaterial, visible and invisible. In other words, he made all of the angels, the various powers and authorities in the spirit world. Jesus is the first cause, the instrumental cause and the final cause of all creation. He is its origin, the means by which it came into existence, and its purpose. Since he is the mirror-like image of God, everything was created by him, through him, and for him.

That "for him" statement means that Jesus is the central point of creation. In other words, all creation and all history flows from and points to Jesus! The Bible calls him the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Jesus not only created all things, He is the goal of all things. Imagine that - the hands which hold history are nail scarred. The heart from which history beats is

love-filled. The mind which plans history is grace-filled. All history has been fashioned with Christ in mind. All things achieve their intended purpose through him and exist for him. Far from just a big bang theory, all of life and creation draw meaning from Jesus Christ. Every time the dilemmas of life confuse us, the happenings of our lives confound us, when life itself tends to undo us, remember Christ is the Creator, the center, the controller! The world and history are in his hands. It awesome that the one who created the world is the one who loves us so much that he died to save us.

Paul goes on to say that Jesus is preeminent because he is the **cohesion of life**. Verse 17 says, “He himself is before all things, and by him all things hold together.” Scientists for decades have been trying to figure out what exactly holds the universe together. They’ve identified protons, neutrons, electrons, and photons. But none of this explains what gives objects mass, what holds it all together. Over 50 years ago, physicist Peter Higgs – along with 5 others – theorized a particle that would explain what gives the universe mass. They called it the Higgs Boson but it quickly gained the nickname “the God Particle.” What they theorized fifty years ago Paul had an answer for almost 2000 years ago!

Jesus holds it all together! Without Jesus, everything would fly apart. He is the glue, the magnet, the center of gravity. Jesus holds the world and our lives together. “The heavenly machinery moves with incredible mathematical precision.

We can foretell years in advance the occasion of an eclipse of the visit of a comet. The tides rise and fall, the seasons come and go, moons wax and wane – all under submission to Christ. ...All factors of time and space are under the Lord Jesus' control.”<sup>vi</sup> In Acts, Paul preached that “In Christ we live and move and have our being.”<sup>vii</sup>

The circumstances of our lives are like the spokes of a wheel and Christ is the sprocket that holds them all together. When life pitches back and forth, when we are ready to buckle under the stress and strain, when we're jostled by the rock and roll, remember it is Jesus Christ who holds it all together.

Think of the last time you looked through a Kaleidoscope. It's made up of nothing but broken pieces of glass yet when the light breaks through they form the most beautiful designs imaginable. It's as if the light holds it together and makes something out of nothing, brings beauty out of ugliness, wholeness out of brokenness. Jesus holds our lives together, fits the pieces into his picture, makes something out of nothing, and brings beauty out of ugliness, wholeness out of brokenness. If Christ as lord is the center of our lives, the circumference will take care of itself. Let me break that down for you.

We say, “It's impossible.” Jesus says, “All things are possible.”

We say, “I'm too exhausted.” Jesus says, “I will give you rest.”

We say, “Nobody really loves me.” Jesus says, “I love you.”



We say, "I don't have the strength to go on." Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient."

We say, "I can't do it." Jesus says, "You can do all things through my strength."

We say, "I can't forgive myself." Jesus says, "I forgive you."

We say, "I can't manage." Jesus says, "I will supply all your needs."

We say, "I'm afraid." Jesus says, "I have not given you a spirit of fear."

We say, "I'm worried." Jesus says, "Cast all your cares on me."

We say, "I have no faith." Jesus says, "I have given everyone a measure of faith."

We say, "I don't know the way." Jesus says, "I am the way."

We say, "I don't know what's true." Jesus says, "I am the truth."

We say, "I just want to die." Jesus says, "I am the life."

We say, "I'm lost in the darkness of this world." Jesus says, "I am the light of the world!"

We say, "I feel alone." Jesus says, "I will never leave you or forsake you!"

If Christ as Lord is the center of our lives, the circumference will take care of itself.

There's a story Passengers on a plane at Detroit Metropolitan Airport were waiting to take off for what was then known as the Tri-City Airport, which serves

Saginaw, Bay City, and Midland. Over the intercom, the flight attendant welcomed the passengers and stated that the destination would be Midland. Concerned remarks from passengers alerted her to her omission so she tried a second announcement, this time saying they would land in Tri-City and Bay City. People now began to chuckle, realizing her frustration. In her third attempt she mentioned only Saginaw; now laughter broke out. At that point a very authoritative voice came over the intercom: “This is the captain. Don’t worry, you’re in good hands because I know where we’re going!”<sup>viii</sup> Jesus, the one who was there from the start... Jesus, the one who holds it all together, holds our destiny and our lives in his loving, nail-scarred hands! Our destiny is the result of a big bang – the big bang of a hammer on nails on a hill called Calvary! It’s the big bangs and nails that hung Jesus to a cross. Because of that cross current, what was once a mystery is no longer.

I’ve used the word “preeminent” several times in this but I haven’t defined it. Merriam-Webster defines “preeminent” as “having paramount rank, dignity, or importance.” Paul tells us that Jesus is preeminent because he is the image of the invisible God, the creator of all and the cohesion of life. Here’s the thing: none of this matters if Jesus isn’t preeminent in our lives.

It’s not enough to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord of everybody. I must trust him to be my Lord. You must trust him to be your Lord. We must trust him enough

to give him the paramount rank and importance in our lives. Not just a part. Not just a prominent part. Jesus must be the preeminent part in all we do.

Don't be one of those folks who says "Jesus is my co-pilot." If you are, get your priorities straight! A co-pilot takes orders from the pilot. Jesus isn't taking orders from you. If Jesus is your co-pilot, you're on the wrong plane. Jesus is the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, flight attendant, and mechanic, plus Jesus owns and operates the airline and created the airplane! Jesus is preeminent; we are merely passengers on the journey. We need to trust in Jesus to get us where we need to be.

Let me share with you how pastor and professor Ray Ortlund put it on his blog some time ago. He said our hearts are multi-divided like it is in many board rooms. "Imagine," he says, "a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a whiteboard. A committee sits around the table in your heart. There is the social self, the private self, the work self, the sexual self, the recreational self, the religious self, and others. The committee is arguing and debating and voting, constantly agitated and upset. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision. We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is that we're just divided, unfocused, hesitant, and unfree."

Ortlund says, "That kind of person can 'accept Jesus' in two ways. One way is to invite him onto the committee. Give him a vote too. But then he becomes just

one more complication,” just another voice adding to all the confusion. But there is a better “way to ‘accept Jesus,’ and that way is to say to Him, ‘My life isn’t working. Please come in and fire my committee, every last one of them. I hand myself over to you. I am your responsibility now. Please run my whole life for me.’”<sup>ix</sup>

Don’t just give Jesus a part in your heart and life. Give him the preeminent part, the only part in the boardroom of your heart. Then you can be free, focused and undivided in your pursuit of the abundant life he created for you to live.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> John B. Jamison, Be Real, www.Sermons.com

<sup>ii</sup> John 1:1, 14a

<sup>iii</sup> John 14:9 (paraphrased)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/prototype>

<sup>v</sup> From Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Edited by Michael P. Green, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI © 1989 by Michael P. Green, #264

<sup>vi</sup> John Phillips, Our Creator and Sustainer, Moody, March 1983, p. 113 (not positive of this reference)

<sup>vii</sup> Acts 17:28 (paraphrased)

<sup>viii</sup> From Life in These United States, Reader’s Digest, April 1985

<sup>ix</sup> “#9: What Does It Mean to Accept Jesus?” Ray Ortlund: Christ Is Deeper Still, blog, 6-4-10; www.PreachingToday.com