

Questions for Further Reflection

Colossians 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

This text is ideal for our celebration of The Feast of Christ the King. One of the great difficulties with calling Jesus “King”, is our association of the title with the kind of power and authority human sovereigns wield. In one sense, that is an effective analogy, for Christians have declared from the very beginning the proclamation, kerygma in the Greek, that Jesus is Lord, King, and Sovereign.¹ But that understanding does not go far enough.

Particularly in this passage, we see that while Jesus is the head of all people, his headship moves beyond humankind. He is the Sovereign of All.

We see this particularly in verses 15-17 which, it could be argued, refer to the account of creation in Genesis: the Son is the “firstborn of all creation”, in him “all things were created”. And if not referring to it, this text can surely be read against, or alongside the Genesis story:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. (Genesis 1:1-6)

Christian tradition, citing especially the Johannine² books, has often spoken about Jesus as The Word. Reread the first few verses of the account of creation (quoted above), reflecting on Jesus as the Creating Word spoken by God.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the Word that issues forth from the mouth of God?

How does this challenge or affirm your understanding of Jesus?

What creating power, if any, does that Word have today? In the world around you? In your life?

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

In light of the hard work in deeply conflicted places like the former Yugoslavia, and the Republic of South Africa, and Northern Ireland, reconciliation is an often discussed political, social, ethical, and religious concept. How are we to understand what reconciliation means in the context of the scripture

above? How can we be sure that when the Biblical text speaks of reconciliation, it does not mean something fundamentally different than we do?

One way to determine a word's meaning is to find the word in another part of scripture.³ Much like the "context clues" approach to reading as a young child, this is a very helpful way to gain understanding of meanings that might be somewhat unclear if one does not read Greek and Hebrew.

For example the word translated "reconcile" is found in this key passage from Matthew.⁴ We will use this passage as an aid in understanding the text from Colossians.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:20-24)

There are differing opinions on what is necessary for reconciliation. What conditions seem necessary given the passage above?

Reread the passage from Colossians. Why do we need reconciliation with God?

Do you believe it necessary to personally reconcile with God, in the same manner as the passage from Matthew 5 calls us to be reconciled with our sisters and brothers?

Do you feel reconciliation is an action of God? An action we must actively engage to receive? Something in-between those two understandings? Something entirely different?

Given your understanding of reconciliation, what does it mean for us and all creation to have been reconciled through Christ's death on the cross?

What part, if any do you believe we as believers play in this reconciliation? Are there actions we must take to be fully reconciled?

If yes, what are those actions? If no, what is our faithful response to the action God has taken?

¹ This idea is drawn from a great short book, Christopher Bryan's *And God Spoke* (Cowley Publications, 2002)

² Those scholars believe were written by St. John and/or his disciples: The Gospel of John, The First, Second, and Third Letters of John, and The Revelation to John

³ It helps that the books of the New Testament were written within the span of less than 200 years. While usage may change in that period, it is unlikely to be absolutely obscure- think reading Jane Austen versus reading Shakespeare.

⁴ Colossians 1:20 ἀποκαταλλάττω (pronounced apokatallassó), Matthew 5:24 καταλλάσσω (pronounced katallássō), Strong's Concordance with Greek and Hebrew Lexicon; from The Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org>