

SLIDE 1 – Cosmic Christ

Jesus of Nazareth is the “cosmic Christ,” the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; the one in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created. Jesus is the ‘head of the body, the church’; in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Jesus, the Christ, who has in his resurrection and his place beside God in heaven become a vast figure, ruling over much more than the earthly church and its believers. He is the Sovereign of the Universe, a universe he loves with God the Father as his co-creator.

False teachers were telling the Christians of Colossae that the created, physical world was bad, and they needed to escape from it through special knowledge and religious practices. In response to these false teachings the New Testament letter attributed to Paul stresses that God created everything in heaven and on earth through Christ. It is emphasized that Christ existed before the creation of the world and that Christ holds all things together. Paul was giving the Christians of Colossae a very real word of encouragement for the struggles of their day.

The one who created the universe and the planet on which we reside also is the one who has made a way for the redemption of all. Christ, who went to the cross, began the work of making peace there. This is a work that finds its completion in Christ. Because of the cross, we can live in great confidence and joy that all the things that are wrong will be made right and that Christ has already begun putting all things right. The Apostle Paul gives us reason to celebrate Christ in ways that invite others to meet him and want to be excited because of him.

SLIDE 2 – Star Trek Enterprise

Today we end our series on Creation with Cosmos Sunday. The scriptures encourage us to reflect on Christ and the divine’s emphasis of life and well-being and redemption. The theme leads us also to reflect on planetary systems and an ever expanding understanding of the universe. I remember how the excitement of space exploration was part of my childhood. Of course the entertainment industry highlighted it. How does Planet Earth fit into the whole universe? How might we be part of the search for new life? I remember the first Star Trek series that was filled with adventure and moral tales. The intro to Star Trek the Next Generation is this: *Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and*

new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before! – Captain Jean-Luc Picard

We were fascinated by space imaginary and real in the 1960's and 1970's and 1980's. We watched as a nation whenever a rocket launched into space. We followed the trajectories and orbits. We felt the victories and the defeats. We wondered at what would be discovered with a landing on the moon.

SLIDE 3 – Stars All Colors

I remember lying on the grass on a summer's night starrng up at the stars. I remember being held by the warmth of the earth and observing twinkling lights too many to count. The sky and its galaxies were a vast frontier. Would they hold answers to new life and new peoples? Throughout the years I have attended to eclipses of the sun and the moon, to Perseid meteor showers, to middle school science projects in the middle of winter where my sons were asked to view and map out stars of various colors, and other observations. There was an incredible expansion of knowledge of the universe in the 20th and 21st centuries. Almost daily I am reminded that underneath the gains of knowledge there were struggles for equity and equality.

SLIDE 4 – Jupiter

In 1925 a doctoral thesis at Harvard University by Celia Payne-Gaposchkin correctly proposed that the sun and other stars were made up of hydrogen and helium. She had been recruited to study at Harvard by Dr. Harlow Shapley, a male scientist who valued her knowledge. Payne's thesis was rejected by a different male scientist who had position and power over her work but did not respect her. A few years later he realized her work was correct but he took credit for the discovery. Payne continued her research and was supported over the years by male colleagues who valued her knowledge. They were persistent in taking small steps to improve her position. They supported publishing her work with her name. They gave her students. They gave her lesser titles until they could persuade the school to make her a professor. Finally in 1956 she became the first woman to be promoted to full professor within the faculty from Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Science. One wrong had been made right.

SLIDE 5 – Supernova

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have also been periods of an expansion of biblical scholarship. It is a very exciting time to study the scriptures and preach. I am hearing new angles to grace that I had not noticed in previous years. The Holy Spirit is speaking through new voices and we hear about love without limits, wild hope for vanishing species, being welcoming and affirming, noticing the cries for justice and more. The faith is not just about believing the right things but about doing what is right and good and life-giving. The promises we make at baptism have the possibility for a grand trajectory. From the basis of worship, new life proceeds.

Christ's redemption: the final frontier. These are the gatherings, the worship of Christ's people. Our continuing mission: to be a fountain of life for all who gather around Christ; to be a river of compassion for the world, because of the abundance God provides. To see how love and mercy shape our lives and the lives of those around us. To boldly make right and redeem the world!

SLIDE 6 – ringed Neptune

The one who created the universe and the planet on which we reside also is the one who has made a way for the redemption of all. The God of the universe created the earth and all creation and declared it “good!” The God of the universe cared so much for humanity and all creation that through the Son God became more like humans so that they might become more like him. In Jesus God engaged the world in divine love and divine care for all creation.

Christ, who went to the cross, began the work of making peace there. This is a work that finds its completion in Christ. Because of the cross, we can live in great confidence and joy that all the things that are wrong will be made right and that Christ has already begun putting all things right. When we are claimed in the waters of baptism we are being called into a life that is joined to Christ. We learn to want what Christ cares about.

SLIDE 7 – Galaxy Evolution

Today those who gather for Dr. Jim Boulter's final session on Sustainability will hear again an urgent plea to learn how to care for the earth and all creation using the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The work of sustainability is fraught with distractions, unexpected events, and resistance which impede the progress of the goals. But it is also filled with much hope and possibility when

what seems unimaginable becomes real. If you haven't heard these lectures or need to hear them again the recordings will soon be made available. And as a Green Team forms in the congregation we will be directed toward practical ways and actions to support the work of sustainability. Through this work creation and all that makes for life can be renewed.

We will need to act in practical ways in order for there to be renewal that matters. We can be part of the trajectory that puts things right. We can be part of the work of Christ to redeem the world.

SLIDE 8 – Orion Nebula

We are more familiar with interpersonal interactions when it comes to talk of redemption. I came across an example of divine love which fits this week with our call to follow the Cosmic Christ who redeems the world.

Memoirist Heather King spent a year praying with Thérèse of Lisieux's insights, and describes how Thérèse practiced her "little way" through relationships:

Some of the best-known anecdotes about Thérèse concern her saintlike, though seemingly small efforts with respect to her fellow nuns:

1. She overcame her instinctive dislike of a particular nun, and . . . [exhibited] such charity that the sister actually thought Thérèse felt a special fondness for her.
2. She stifled her almost compulsive desire to turn around and glare at the nun behind her in choir who made a clicking noise (apparently by tapping her rosary against her teeth), realizing that the more charitable act would be to pretend that the sound was music to Christ's ears and endure the annoyance in silence.
3. Every evening at dinnertime Thérèse took it upon herself to usher a particularly vexatious elderly nun from chapel to her place at table in the refectory, even going the extra mile to lovingly cut the crabapple's bread.

Saints do not live in some other world. . . . They live in the same world we do, and they show us that spirituality is intensely down-to-earth. We learn to love through frustration, disappointment, and failure. We learn through the seemingly trivial incidents of our daily lives.

“When I *am feeling* nothing . . . then is the moment for seeking opportunities, *nothings*, which please Jesus. . . . For example, a smile, a friendly word, when I would want to say nothing, or put on a look of annoyance,” [1] Thérèse wrote, and “I have no desire to go to Lourdes to have ecstasies. I prefer (the monotony of sacrifice)!” [2]

King applies the spirit of Thérèse’s small, loving acts to her own life:

I began to see the almost superhuman strength required to refrain from, say, repeating a juicy bit of gossip, or rolling my eyes, or allowing my voice to get harsh when I was upset. I began to sense as well that, just *because* they’re so difficult, such acts perhaps do far more good than we can ever know. Standing patiently in line helped the other people in line to be patient as well. Blessing the other person in traffic, even though nobody heard or saw, somehow encouraged someone else to bless the next person. When the neighborhood noise bothered me, I sometimes took to starting with one corner of my apartment complex, visualizing the person or people who lived there, and working my way around, praying for the inhabitants of each. (Other times I took to tearing out my hair and cursing.) . . .

We can try, at great personal sacrifice, to be perfectly righteous, a perfect friend, perfectly responsive, perfectly available, perfectly forgiving. But at the heart of our efforts must lie the knowledge that, by ourselves, we can do, heal, or correct nothing. The point is not to be perfect, but to “perfectly” leave Christ to do, heal, and correct in us what he wills.