

## 4/25/21 WORSHIP SERVICE

### WELCOME – PASTOR LOIS

Thank you so much, Russell and members of the Bel Canto choir! We welcome all of you from Hesston College and everyone who's here to worship God on this beautiful morning – we're so glad you're all here!

Last week pastor Caleb did the first in a series focusing on the many names and images for God that we find in our scriptures. Last week we talked about God the Creator, the God of Israel who told Moses to say "I AM has sent me". Today we'll talk about Jesus, the one who came to earth in human form to show us the most complete reflection of God.

So as we begin this morning, we take a few moments to share with one another any announcements or opportunities.

### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

God, we're gathered here on this yard, on this beautiful spring morning, grateful for this time, set aside to rest, to sing and pray to worship and to fellowship. We're grateful for these musicians who've come to us from Hesston to praise you and to bless us with their music. Go with them in the coming days as they travel and sing together, using their music to glorify you and to move the hearts of their listeners.

We bring to you our prayers and praises, God. We praise you for safe travels and the return home for Steve and Sandy Banman. Thank you, God, for the excellent medical treatment Steve received at Mayo Clinic – we pray for continued wisdom and clarity for his medical team here at home, that they would know how to move forward with on-going treatment. Be with Steve and Sandy now in the coming days as they re-create the rhythm of their lives and as Steve continues to heal and regain strength.

God, we pray for our congregation as we also heal and regain strength from the effects of covid this past 13 months. Grant us wisdom and courage. Give us hearts and minds that are open to new ideas and possibilities of how to be your church as we reconfigure and re-imagine who we can be as your followers and messengers of your good news. We acknowledge that some of us feel uncertain or maybe even frightened as we consider what the future might hold. Lead us with your Holy Spirit, give us the will and the fortitude to follow your lead, to take risks for your kingdom, to boldly take hold of opportunities that may have opened in the last year. We pray this for our congregation and for all who are trying to faithfully follow your call. Give us your spirit of unity, of encouragement and of working together for the building up of your body, the church. Give us your compassion and the desire to care for the well-being of all.

As we look ahead to the summer months, we pray for your blessing, Lord, on those who are committed to teaching our children and youth – for Sunday school, for VBS and Jr High day

camps. Be with the youth and Rachael and Brian as they make plans for education and activities during the summer.

We pray for the care and keeping of this earth and her inhabitants. This beautiful earth is the only home we have – gifted to us by you. We confess our complicity in the systematic destruction of the planet and the depletion of its resources. We dare not ask for your forgiveness until we have honestly and radically tried to change our behavior. We acknowledge that the kind of change needed to bring your shalom, your kingdom here, on earth, is a shift in the structures of power and wealth. We pray, God, that the tight grip on dominance and control, the worship of greed and violence, the loyalty to divisiveness and fear would be replaced with a willingness to release, an embrace of generosity and a fearless joy that leads humanity to you and your love. Help us to see this vision and to move toward it in our daily lives.

Be with us now as we continue in our worship; give us new and helpful insights about who Jesus was and is – your own self, God, come to us as one of us, teaching us what your love looks like in human form. We pray in his name. Amen.

#### OFFERING PRAYER (BASED ON VT 1023)

At this time, we will have a prayer of blessing for the gifts and generosity that are among us. You are invited to drop off offerings as you leave later or to continue giving in other ways. Please stand if comfortable doing so as we pray:

*Christ Jesus,*

*What can we offer as your body today?*

*We bring all that we have and all that we are.*

*The gifts of silence and the gifts of words*

*The gifts of making music and the gifts of listening.*

*The gifts of leading and the gifts of following*

*The gifts of faith and the gifts of doubt*

*The gifts of the head and the gifts of the heart*

*Grant that all we are comes together to strengthen the living body of your church.*

#### “IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD” – PASTOR CALEB

Colossians 1:15-20

Last week, we looked at some of the many names and images of God, and this week we do the same for Jesus.

In fact, as I prepared for this week's message, I discovered an even larger number of names that we can give to Jesus. All of these names help us not only understand who Jesus is, but deepen our relationship to Jesus.

We'll look at what some of these many names are, but we'll come back to this amazing early Christian poetry about Christ found in Colossians that teaches us how Jesus' love that took him *all the way* to the cross is our flesh and blood picture of God's heart.

*What's in a name?*

A name is significant. Our identities and our uniqueness are wrapped up in our names. It's hard to imagine how we would have relationships in community without names given to individual people. It would get kind of old to always say something like "you with the red shirt."

When we named our kids, I realized that this is the one decision in life we would make that would most likely outlive us.

Our son Austin has my middle name. The name Austin comes from Augustine, who was an early Christian theologian.

Austin's middle name is Ardis, which was my grandfather's middle name. He was an only child, and his parents gave him his mother's birth name as his first name – kind of an odd thing to do.

If my parents had done that, my first name would be Vance – which is a perfectly good first name, if you ask Glen Unrau. But I'm really glad we didn't try to name our kid "Swartzendruber" – that's a mouthful for a first name.

Josiah Benjamin, our second son, received biblical names that we like. Josiah means "Yahweh supports," while Benjamin, the name of Beth's grandfather, means "son of the right hand." Josiah now has passed the milestone of being able to pronounce his brother's name.

When Beth told Austin recently where his name came from, that it's my middle name, Austin's reaction was: *"No, Austin is my name! His names are Caleb and daddy!"*

So, I guess I'll stick with those two names.

#### NAMES FOR JESUS

The name Jesus was about as common as John or Tom among first century Jews, but it's not without significance. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation."

Followers of Jesus subversively gave their executed teacher the title of "Savior," a title normally reserved for Roman Emperors.

The other names, titles, or images of Jesus that the Christian faith gives to him are also not names in the same sense. Christ was never Jesus' last name. Jesus' playmates as a child never would have called him "Son of Man," or "Messiah." That would be like saying to another kid, "hey *Chosen One*, pass me the ball!" or "Thanks for inviting me over, *Crown Prince*!"

I'll mention a number of names; most were not used during Jesus' earthly life, at least not without controversy. They are rather affirmations of our faith.

During his life, many people called Jesus “Rabbi” or “teacher” out of respect for his authoritative teaching.

Jesus asked his disciples on one occasion: “Who do people say that I am?” You know the story – they answer: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter breaks the silence with the inspired answer: “You are the Messiah!”

Christ or Messiah is one of the first names we now think of, along with “Son of God.” The Gospel of John concludes, *“But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name”* (John 20:31)

Christ means *“anointed”* – a symbolic commissioning for a king. In his first sermon, Jesus read from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18).

Jesus frequently called himself *“Son of Man,”* or “Human One,” a name for an exalted human figure who Jews expected to be instrumental in ushering in God’s kingdom in the last days.

A beautiful hymn in Philippians 2, similar to the one we will look at in Colossians, concludes by elevating Jesus to the status of *“Lord.”* But Jesus earns the title Lord, specifically because he was willing to first become the lowliest of slaves and become the victim of the most humiliating of deaths on an execution stake.

Yet Jesus himself, as he said goodbye to his inner circle of disciples, and prepared them to carry on his mission, released the hierarchical title and said to them, “I have called you *friends*, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:15-16).

Jesus described himself in very tender terms. As he mourned for the coming destruction of Jerusalem and her inhabitants, he called himself a mother hen, who wished to hide her chicks under her wings (Luke 13:34).

The Gospel of John is particularly rich with names for Jesus in the so-called “I am statements.” Jesus calls himself the “Bread of Life,” the “Light of the World,” the “Good Shepherd,” the “True Vine,” and the “Way, Truth, and Life.”

The first Christians found names for Jesus within the Old Testament scriptures, such as Emmanuel: *“God with us”* or *“Prince of Peace.”*

This has already been a lot of names (I think I’m up to 15) and I want to turn now to Colossians where we have a couple more.

#### HYMN IN COLOSSIANS

The passage Tammy read from Colossians was probably an early Christian hymn, possibly with some explanatory phrases added in the letter to the Colossians.

Imagine singing these beautiful words with the earliest believers, words that describe Jesus as the *“Image of the Invisible God,”* the *Head* of the body that is the Church.

Christ is also called the *Firstborn* two times: “Firstborn of all creation” and “Firstborn from the dead.” We’ll start with “Firstborn” and then move to “Image.”

#### FIRSTBORN, WISDOM, AND LOGOS

As “Firstborn,” Colossians describe Christ as present from the beginning of time, working with God to create everything that exists.

Christ as “Firstborn” in the hymn is closely related to Christ as Word in the Gospel of John and also to Jewish tradition about the Wisdom of God.

John 1 says: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

Further down the page, *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...”*

Compare that to this passage from the Old Testament book of Proverbs. It’s about God’s Wisdom, personified as a woman.

Wisdom says of herself:

*“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—*

Wisdom rejoices in the inhabited world and delights in the human race.

Early Christians understood the Eternal Christ as both Wisdom and Word.

Writing four centuries after Jesus, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, said, “Wisdom is the Word [Logos]... and this Word is Christ” (*Orations against the Arians*).

Clement of Alexandria wrote, “The Word is all to the child, both father and mother and tutor and nurse” (*Paedagogus*).

The one new insight of the early Christian identification of Christ with the Wisdom and Word of God present at creation, is that Christ is not only the agent of creation, Christ is also the agent of reconciliation.

In the language of Colossians, Christ is not only “Firstborn of all creation,” but “Firstborn from the dead,” the power of life and resurrection after darkness has done its worst.

We’ll see how we are invited into that new life as we look at Jesus as the “*Image of God*.”

#### IMAGE OF GOD

Next, what does it mean to be Image of the Invisible God? The Greek word for “image” is also where we get “icon.”

I guess you can put Jesus on your desktop as a shortcut to God.

Eastern Orthodox Christians make it a spiritual practice to gaze at special artwork depicting Jesus or other spiritual leaders as a way to experience the presence of God.

To say Jesus is the image of God is ironic and paradoxical language. Something invisible doesn’t have an image. Yet Jesus was a flesh-and-blood human being who lived in a particular place during particular years. We don’t have the privilege of knowing Jesus during his earthly life, but we know his story.

To know that story, to imagine meeting the earthly Jesus, is to look at the face of God. That’s our Christian confession of faith.

As image of the invisible God, Jesus puts a flesh and blood face to the character and heart of God.

There is a Christian podcaster named Trip Fuller, who often says, “*God is at least as nice as Jesus*.” What he means by that is that so often our concept of God is of an old man with a beard, far-off and aloof who is extremely angry at all of us because of our sins, so angry that we are all doomed. But then nice Jesus volunteers to be God’s punching bag so that once God has totally vented his anger, God can at least be kind to the special group of folks that say the right words about Jesus.

We should qualify the statement a little by noting that the Jesus of the Gospel wasn’t always nice. The word nice doesn’t do justice. Jesus had no problem calling people out for their lies -- it was always the most religious folks, and occasionally the political and wealthy elite.

But this is also the Jesus who said while dying a brutal death, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*.”

This is the character of God, a God who relentlessly pursues all people and all creation in love.

*You might be remembering that Genesis says that human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God.*

It’s the very same word for “image,” in fact. That means that God’s original plan is for all of humanity to reflect what Jesus is.

Yet we are a fractured image. We are like cracked mirrors that reflect an image, but not a whole and complete image.

Jesus is the restored image. Jesus fulfils what we have fallen short of, and Jesus is the firstborn to lead us all to become restored and reconciled people.

Christ is the pathway to be authentically human and *also* participate in the life of God.

We already see the face of Jesus in other people, especially in the faces of those who embody the fruit of the Spirit, and also in people who are voiceless and marginalized, those of which Jesus said, "whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me."

Jesus reflects the fullness of God's life, and we are called to *become* whole human beings who reflect the character of Christ. This potential already resides within us.

It is more about believing this is already true is who we are then slapping ourselves for our sins and shortcomings or feeling we can't be our true selves. There is still painful work of dying to what is false within us to allow what is true in us to live.

## CONCLUSION

We can find rest and peace in this faith: that the very ground of the universe, the nature of reality itself is love -- a love that is willing to accept suffering and cost on behalf of another.

That's the pattern that we have in Jesus' life and death. That's where this truth took concrete form. That's how all things hold together in Christ, and how God brings into reconciliation everyone and everything, making peace through Christ's broken body.

It's an unfolding drama that we participate in, not by being perfect or having arrived, but when we discover ourselves as image-bearers of God, with the potential to become *restored* and *whole* image-bearers.

While the Christ-hymn of verses 15-20 is just about Jesus, the verses immediately before and after invite us into this drama:

God 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*" (1:13-14).

We were once estranged and hostile in mind, but now we are reconciled to God through the broken flesh and blood body of Jesus of Nazareth. Even while we are still imperfect, still failures, still sinners, still broken, still with our unresolved issues and wounds, we are "holy and blameless and irreproachable" in the eyes of God because of the work of Christ.

This week, pick a name for Jesus out of the many names that we've mentioned. Let it be the basis of reflection or prayer for the week.

See how it impacts your understanding of and connection to Jesus.

Let that name guide your imagination as you picture yourself, the people you care about, and the people and creation you are *called to care about*, all a part of this reconciliation, the peace that Christ is creating even now, even today.

May it be so.