**Reflections 20-26 July – Seeing the invisible God**

**Bible study on Colossians 1:15-28**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, as we gather here today,
open our eyes,
so we can truly see you.
Open our ears,
so we can truly hear you.
Calm our busy hands,
so we don’t miss a thing.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Colossians 1: 15-28

**15**The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16**For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **17**He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18**And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. **19**For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20**and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

**21**Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29487g)] your evil behaviour. **22**But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23**if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

**24**Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. **25**I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— **26**the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. **27**To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

**28**He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. **29**To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

As with Abraham’s visitors, so with Jesus – it is easy to miss the coming of God when he arrives in such an unexpected form. In one of Paul’s richest theological reflections on the coming of Jesus, he talks about the crucified Christ as the invisible God made visible. Paul tells his first hearers that true authority and power are not found in the pomp and might of Caesar, but in the humility and suffering of Jesus. His point is even clearer if you read these verses backwards:

In verses 20a-19 (see also 2:13-15), Paul shows that reconciliation comes through self-giving, laying aside your interests to serve the needs of others. We see a pale reflection of this in people such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela; but we see it most gloriously in Jesus. Then verses 17-16 point to God making all things new. All through human history our suffering king has been holding creation together even as we try to tear it apart; his suffering is not limited to the cross! And now Jesus remakes this ruined world, creates harmony, peace, new life and reconciles cultures; he invites us to be part of it, paying our price of entry through the cross. So verse 15 tells us that if we want to see God, then we need to look not at Caesar in his pomp, but at Jesus on his cross. It is as we look at the crucified one that we see the world-making, world-reconciling God in all his glory.

Paul paints this picture to show us how we’ll live. We are all invited to enter God’s kingdom (vv.21-23), through the offered body of Jesus (v.22). But this will not be an easy ride (v.24): If we follow Jesus, we’ll suffer as he did. This is a graphic picture of what we might call the ‘convulsions of redemption’ (see also Romans 8:18-28), i.e. the pains and the problems by which the Church grows into the signpost to God’s kingdom. As we embody the values of Jesus, we will encounter opposition but, if we respond with a servant heart, others may see the image of the true God (vv.25-26). And so Paul points to our hope (vv.28-29), which keeps us going because one day we will be perfect in a perfect world (v.28) – that is the glory we hope for.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

A former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said, ‘God is Christlike and in him is no unChristlikeness at all.’ We see that in Paul’s words to the Colossians.

Read forwards, they tell us how all the majesty and glory of God was somehow squeezed into Jesus. But read backwards, they show us that this is how God has always been, that it is in grace and condescension (that is, his willingness to communicate with humanity in a way we can understand) and his preparedness to suffer that Creation is held together and ultimately reconciled to him.

Reflect on this profound meditation on the identity of our God and marvel at what his love has done for us. Use this passage to draw the group into the embrace of this loving God.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* Have you used digital photography to help you see something more clearly?
* What helps you to see and know God?
* Where in nature do you see God?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, life is busy.
Help us this week to take some time
to sit at your feet
and truly see and hear from you.
Be in our decision-making and in our thoughts.
**Amen.**