



November 21, 2010
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Christ the King: More Than All the World Luke 24:36-45

I'm preaching this morning for Pastor Jeremy. I was honored to be asked; grateful to be able to actually *do* something concrete to show my love and support of Diane whose dad, Cliff died so suddenly, and for Jeremy, the children and Diane's dear mom.

I have to tell you: ultimate things have been on my mind for weeks, now. Cliff's passing is part of it. But the same week I led the graveside service for Sharon Lambert, a very dear friend of Carolyn and mine. Like Diane's dear parents, like Carolyn and me, Sharon and her husband Bob loved each other profoundly, knew they were God's gift to each other, and together they loved the Lord Jesus so much. She fought cancer for 7 years and died three weeks ago, her body a heartbreaking shell. All of this and more just brought me to my knees for a whole morning a week ago in tears, prayer, worship and fasting. Makes you think: Okay, no baloney, no sweet pious stuff that isn't rock solid true: I want to get down to what is really REAL. I don't want the best of human reasoning, I don't want someone's theological necessities, and I especially don't want any shallow, thin, wishful thinking pop culture trash about heaven, humans, and the universe. We're talking about people I *love* here: Ultimate issues like what is really true about the universe, about me and my loved ones, demand ultimate answers with evidence behind them, answers that are permanent.

So, when I was asked if I'd preach for Jeremy on this Sunday we're celebrating Christ as King, I knew I wanted to have us grapple with Colossians 1: 15-20. It's the passage Jeremy was going to preach from before Cliff died. It is a passage that is precious to me because it's about the way things *really* are in the universe . . . and how they really are for me, and for you, too.

When I was a kid, the answer to a question like, "Do you wanna go to Disneyland this summer?" was "Are you kidding? More than anything in the world!" There are things I want to know, and there is someone I want to be, more than anything in the world. Please open your Bibles with me to Colossians 1:15. Here we're going to read that Jesus is more than all the world.

[Read Luke 24:36-45]

That passage was almost certainly a hymn that the early church sang. When Paul included it in his letter, the Colossians probably already knew the words and the tune—just as we know Amazing Grace. Maybe they hummed along when the letter was read to them. Please listen to this: if these words are the truth about Jesus, then they tell us what is true about you and me and about the entire universe . . . and they tell us the future of those who are in Christ.

Now, what made the early church decide that the man Jesus of Nazareth was in fact God's Son, really and truly God-with-us in the skin and bones of Jesus—that he is the One who created the universe, that he's the glue that holds everything in the universe together; and that he is the firstborn from the dead? Very fancy stuff! Well, it was partly the miracles, of course: feeding the 5,000 with a few loaves of bread and some fish, healing people, loving people high and low, walking on water, raising the dead. All of that pointed them in the right direction, but these are not the things that "did it" for them about Jesus and his relationship to everything that exists.

What did it for them about Jesus were their experiences of him after he was raised from the dead. And, just to remind us, he appeared to lots and lots of people, most of whom were still alive when the Colossians were singing this hymn: the women, the 12 disciples, more than 500 people at the same time; and after he'd ascended into heaven, he appeared to the apostle Paul, who wrote the letter we've read a bit of. We'll never get it about Jesus until we get it about what he was like after his resurrection.

If you're a Christian you almost certainly believe Jesus was raised from the dead; but have you ever asked yourself what Jesus was really like after he was raised from the dead? Here are some questions to get you thinking. They may surprise you—see if you can dredge up some Bible stories from your memory to help get you answers to them: the risen Jesus appeared behind locked and closed doors, so was he a spirit, or kind of a ghost? Or did he have a body—maybe even flesh and bones? He ascended into heaven: so, did he float above the ground or walk right on it? Could you touch him? Could he eat? Was he recognizable—how? Could you tell he had been crucified—how? Would he ever die again?

Now think about it: won't the answers to questions like these matter about *everything*? Not just about Jesus, but about everything—completely everything: about what happens when we die, about the nature of the universe, and about what is really real and really true, and even what it really beautiful? So, let's get to the answers:

Was Jesus a spirit? Shout out yes or no. No—and he wasn't a ghost, either.

Did he have flesh and bones? Yes or no? Hmm. That doesn't sound right to some of us! So, let's look and see what the eyewitnesses experienced and reported.

Please open your Bibles with me to Luke chapter 24. Some of what we're going to read is pretty surprising stuff, so I want you to follow along as I read so you'll know I'm not making anything up.

Look with me at the title over verse 13. What's it say? Yes, "On the road to Emmaus." After his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to Cleopas and another disciple and walked with them to a village called Emmaus. His feet touched the ground and got dirty, don't you think? He explained how the Bible pointed to him, and to his death and resurrection. It was really him, really Jesus. He broke the bread for their meal. And then he just . . . disappeared. They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the rest of Jesus' followers, and while the story was pouring out of them, this is what happened. Please follow along with me as I read beginning in verse 36 (read through 44).

Any surprises? Jesus is showing us our future, here: showing us what we will be like after we've been raised from the dead. He is the firstborn from the dead, Paul said to the Colossian church: Jesus is the very first person ever to be raised from the dead with a resurrection body that is made for life in eternity—he'll never die again.

Let's think about that. If you are going to be like Jesus what are you going to be like? Will you be a spirit, a ghost? Will you have flesh and bones? Will your body be exactly the same then as now? No, your body now never simply disappears as Jesus' did with the boys in Emmaus, and your body now never just appears behind locked and closed doors. Hmm—if your body can go through walls, is it really a body? Yes—Jesus' body was really a body—in fact it was *more* real, more physical, somehow than before his death, but it was different too, wasn't it? Will people recognize you in heaven? Well, did Jesus' friends and loved ones recognize him? Yes, and people will recognize us and our resurrection bodies. But listen to this: it will be as though we've gone from being an acorn to being . . . a whole forest of trees! People will say, "Oh, it's you! I always knew you were this wonderful, this full and complete, this alive, this loved and lovely—wow, this is *you* just as God made you to be!" (Thanks to Rev. Tim Keller for a few of these wonderful images.)

Now, let's think more about the resurrection body of Jesus and the resurrection bodies we will receive from him. Will we still have our scars in heaven? Did Jesus? Yes—you could touch them, even. Hmm, so: In heaven, are the scars in Jesus' hands tragic or sad? Does it seem to you, as it does to me and the folks I've talked to about this that the answer is: No. Somehow in the scars in Jesus resurrection body are not tragic and sad. Amazingly, wonderfully, they are not; somehow they are precious, even, in ways that are hard to describe. But it's something like this, I think. In heaven, the scars in Jesus' hands mean something different from what they meant when the nails were being pounded into him. In heaven, they mean that Jesus' enemies did not have the last word about him, and evil and injustice and outrageousness and agony didn't either. The pain from the nails is all gone, and even the memory of it has changed: the pain then is part of the joy now, and the scars are signs of victory, in some paradoxical, weird, yet very dear way.

And, beloved, some day in heaven all the tears and the loss and shock of Cliff's sudden death—along with so many others—my dad, Carolyn's dad, our friend Sharon, and the dear saint whose service is this afternoon—all of that death will be swallowed up in life. The scars will still be there—our suffering is not denied by God and without those scars we wouldn't exactly be *us* in heaven, would we? And yet, somehow they will be signs of what is true and right and just, signs of how precious it is to love and to share life. On that Day, in the resurrection, we will know for certain and forever that all the injustice we've suffered, the abuse, the addictions, the failure, the sin, the physical handicaps and learning disabilities, the divorce and all the tragedies and outrages of this earth, *never* were what defined us, *never* determined whether we were valuable and loved, *never* were what was really true, and were never the last word about us or about anybody else anywhere, ever. One day, because of Jesus Christ, all of that will have been swallowed up in what is just and true and right and beautiful and permanent. And all our scars no matter how deep, no matter whether we caused them ourselves or had them inflicted on us, and even our sins—no matter how costly (check out I Corinthians 15: 54-56 if you doubt this)—will be reminders of what we have been saved from; and in some amazing way the memory of them will be part of our praise to the Lamb of God.

I am *so* glad for the scars in the risen Lord's hands, so grateful for his blood on the cross. I've suffered some, and some people I love have suffered more than anyone ought to have. Jesus is the *only* God with scars in his hands. No one else could ever really get it about me, or save me—only someone with scars. Thank you Jesus. Death is swallowed up in Life—the life you give.

Now, two more things about Jesus, and these are more directly from our Colossians passage. Jesus is the One for whom and through whom everything was created. Let's think about that

a bit, too, by reflecting on some questions. Which is *bigger*: the risen Jesus or the universe that is composed of billions of galaxies? See that picture on the screen? It's from the Hubble telescope orbiting the earth. See all those points of light that look like stars? They aren't stars . . . they are galaxies, each with billions of stars. See the small red box in the lower right corner near the moon? That's how much of the night sky this picture covers. Now, which is bigger, the universe or the risen Jesus? Which is *older*: the universe or Jesus? 13.7 billion years is the age of the universe currently accepted by the scientific community—including John Lennox who was with us recently. To bring things down to earth, as we say, what's more *real*: the wood of this podium or the risen Jesus?

Here's the wonderful thing about the Eternal Son of God, who came in the flesh and bones of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, risen and ascended into heaven: before the universe was, Christ is. I know the grammar seems bad, but it's great biblical theology: Jesus simply *IS*—before the universe, after it, throughout it, and right now, too. Christ is the One who *IS* and everything else that exists has derivative existence—the stars, this pulpit, you—it all exists because he does, it is here because the Triune God wanted it and created it in the Eternal Son.

The universe is not what its definition says it is: it is *not* "the everything": it is just one vast, and old, thing God created in Christ. God made heaven, too, you know, and it's not in what we call "the universe." And the universe is not a closed system: it is an open system that is pervaded by the presence of its Creator. The Eternal Son, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen from the dead, is before all of that, it all exists for him, holds together in him—and he died on the cross to re-unite it to the Father. Jesus is literally "more than all the world"—more than all of space and time. Despite how much preachers like to say it, miracles are NOT "God invading the universe"—God doesn't "invade" the universe, God *pervades* it! The Triune God is everywhere in it all the time and is continually at work in it, and the Son is holding it all together.

And that's the last thing I want to say about Jesus—and then I'll close with some things I want to say about me, and maybe you.

Paul says that in Jesus Christ all things hold together. One of the men in the Life Group I'm part of put it perfectly: Jesus is the *glue* that holds everything together: me, my marriage, my work, all relationships, heaven, angels, God and humans, the church . . . everything. Nothing will last without Christ, nothing stays together without him. Not even the universe: the universe does not sustain itself, and it doesn't continue to exist and to work because of the laws of gravity, or the existence of dark matter or dark energy: it is held together by the glue of the One through whom and for whom it was created.

Blah, blah, blah—lots of churchy talk. Let me be personal and truthful. My marriage is secure partly because my wife loves me, it's secure a little bit because I'm a pretty good and sensitive kind of guy—but my marriage is secure *mostly* because my wife loves Jesus more than she loves me, and *he* is the glue that has held us together when nothing else in the world could have done so. I know, some of our marriages didn't make it—but even those scars and sorrows will be part of the joy of your salvation when you see Jesus face to face in heaven.

Now, if all this is true, if this is the way things really are about the universe, and about Diane's dad and *all* our loved ones, if this is the way it really is for you and me, if we are going to receive a resurrection body suited for life in eternity, then how shall we live?

More than all the world Jesus is true and real and wonderful. And, more than all the world, I want to live like it's true. Because of the risen Jesus I know what my future is going to be like—and I want to live NOW in that reality. I'm not living as if anything less is true. So this is what my prayer for myself has been recently: Please, Lord Jesus, firstborn from the dead, send your Spirit and fill me with love for you and sweep me up into the future you have prepared for me and all who are in you. Please: I want to live a life that points others to you because it is pure and true. In a whole new way, Lord, I'm beginning to understand purity. Not so I'll be good, exactly, though I'd like that. I want to live a pure life so that others will have life, so that others will believe in you, Jesus. Make me part of the glue, Lord Jesus. Glue me to you, so I will be part of holding everything together in you.

What about you? What matters more than all the world to you? Anything? How are you living, loving, serving? Does your life point to what is really real, to the One through whom you exist? Is there some other reality you long for more than that? This isn't just about you and whether you go to heaven when *you* die—it's about those you love; it's about *their* lives and their destinies. Dad and mom, husbands, wives, friends, bosses, workers: do you want to live a pure life so that others will live? Who or what is the glue in your life—now with those you love, and then in eternity? Really—who? Will you pray right now for those you love and work with and have fun with: pray that your life will point them to life—what you say, what you do, how you treat them, whose side you are on. Let's take a minute of silent prayer—go the Jesus, the One who is more than all the world—and talk about your future and about the people you love.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Luke 17:5-10

Reflect & Apply Individually: Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church - write down some applications.

Reflect & Apply Together: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

Pray together: tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

Dig deeper

1. Reflect on the parts of this passage that show Jesus as fully human and the parts that show Him as God the Creator.
2. Apply the passage to yourself and each other: If the risen Jesus is who Paul says He is in this passage, what does it mean about your life, your relationships, how you live before you die, and what happens to you after you die?