

SERMON: 21 July 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“The Supremacy of Christ as the Indwelling Reality in all Creation” (Colossians 1:15-28)

[SLIDE] CHRIST is

- **Visible image of the invisible God**
- **Existed before God made anything**
- **Supreme over all creation**
- **All things created through - seen and unseen**
- **Holds all creation together**
- **Head of the church**
- **First to rise from the dead**
- **First in everything**

Colossians 1 reveals:

[SLIDE]

21 The human problem = alienation/exclusion from God (in the mind, by wicked thought)

(*apallotriomenous*)(3)

22 The solution = reconciliation through the death of Jesus as the sacrificial love of God (*apokatellaxen* = *to change from one state of feeling to another; to bring back into harmony*)(3)

27 The mystery = Christ in you (*Christos en humin*)

- *a mystery which mystics begin to understand (a mystic being “one who has moved from mere belief to actual inner experience of God”)*

28 The goal = to present everyone complete in Christ

Christ in you is such an awesome concept. But why do people, myself included, find it difficult to live consistently in the fullness of this good news?

This week in one of his daily meditations Richard Rohr wrote this helpful reflection which touches on today’s reading from Colossians.

[SLIDE] “If you want to find God, then honour God within you, and you will always see God beyond you. For it is only God in you who knows where and how to look for God.

[SLIDE] When you honour and accept the divine image within yourself, you cannot help but see it in everybody else, too, and you know it is just as undeserved and unmerited as it is in you.”

Rohr claims that when we begin from this place then we stop judging and start loving unconditionally without asking whether someone is worthy or not.

[SLIDE] Whenever we judge people as to whether they are worthy or not, we divide the world into two camps - those that are in and those that are out. And we can apply this black and white, dualistic thinking to lots of areas in life, whereas the reality of course is that most things, and most people are an imperfect mix of good and bad, sometimes in and sometimes out.

In the slide, it shows classic dualistic thinking - I am right and you are wrong. A more Christ like way is to think, I'm sometimes right and I'm sometimes wrong and you're sometimes right and you're sometimes wrong. That's non dualistic thinking and it's much more healthy for the mind, and body.

When we live with a divided, dualistic mindset, we can find it difficult to accept that God dwells in us as Christ, the hope of glory, because we think God won't dwell in us because of our imperfections.

And I think the main reason for the difficulty is that we can find it hard to accept and forgive our imperfections or embrace our dark side. There may be certain parts of our lives, past or present, where we just find it too difficult to forgive or accept, and our minds can be tortured by it and our hearts can close up.

This, I think, is the sort of alienation from God that Paul speaks about in this letter to the Colossians. And we need to be delivered from that, healed from it, brought back into harmony, brought back into friendship with God through the reconciliation he speaks of in and through Christ.

And to be brought back in such a way that we stand before God, holy and blameless, without a single fault (22) - total reconciliation, standing with a clear conscience, accepting ourselves loved as we are by the God who gives up life for us.

I think this is really cognitive behaviour therapy in its purest form, rooted in the grace and love of God.

It's really important to accept the wholeness of who we are, warts and all, and to forgive ourselves, so that we can more easily accept and forgive others and share the love of Christ freely.

The Scriptures from of old put it as love your neighbour as yourself. For example, in the Book of Leviticus,

[SLIDE] Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself (19:18)

And,

[SLIDE] The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself (19:34)

Something President Trump could do with being reminded of today. There is a dangerous nationalism rising in America which is rooted in this dualistic, black and white thinking and cares little for foreigners. It needs to be stood up against.

[SLIDE] Thankfully there is a counter movement calling for welcome and hospitality, as this poster from Facebook shows - "there is room for you in my country even if you're not exactly like me".

We like to think these things don't happen in our own country but discrimination is at work here too. Often we don't see it because most of us don't belong to minority groups who are most likely to face discrimination. Which is why it's good to hear stories from people who have faced discrimination and try to understand what that feels like so that we can stand with them and stand against the structures which uphold discrimination.

And it's easier to do that if we've accepted the shortcomings in ourselves without judgement and all the while trusting that the slow transfiguring Spirit of Christ is changing us and making us new.

I know this on a personal level. As someone who has faced depression in the past I've not found it easy to accept that part of me was depressed. It took me years to come to terms with the fact that some days were just not good days. Rather than simply accept that to be the case, and I was still loved and worthy, I'd blame myself for not being spiritual enough to deal with it and because I didn't accept it in me I didn't accept it in others and as a result, I would label others as being wholly depressed people rather than people who sometimes felt depressed or had low mood days.

I still sometimes feel depressed but not so often now. I'm learning to accept it and not judge myself for it. It's part of who I am and that's ok. In God's eyes, I can stand before God, holy and blameless, without a single fault, and that's a good place to stand. And I'm not wanting to drift away from that assurance of the Good news.

In that letter to the Colossians, Paul even puts it like this, [SLIDE] "I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am completing what remains of Christ's sufferings for his body, the church" (24).

Maybe our suffering in our bodies and our longings for something better, is also part of Christ's sufferings for the church. For we know that the comfort we receive through what we suffer can be used to comfort others who suffer in similar ways.

Paul says that in his second letter to the Corinthians verses 4-5 claiming that the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ so that we can encourage others.

[SLIDE] As Paul says, the truth is that Christ lives in you so when we suffer Christ suffers in us, when we rejoice Christ rejoices in us, we are made complete through our union with Christ (2:10). We are dying with Christ but we are also rising with Christ. Our roots are growing down into Christ and drawing up nourishment from the Source so we can grow in faith and overflow with thanksgiving for all God has done (2:7).

I came across an interesting writing which illustrates the idea of Christ being everywhere and in every one, whether alive or dead, Christ is within.

In the book, A Rocking-Horse Catholic , written in 1955, theologian Caryl Houselander described how an ordinary underground train journey in London transformed into a vision that changed her life.

“All sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging—workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in every one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them—but because He was in them, and because they were here, the whole world was here too . . . all those people who had lived in the past, and all those yet to come.

I came out into the street and walked for a long time in the crowds. It was the same here, on every side, in every passer-by, everywhere—Christ.

I had long been haunted by the Russian conception of the humiliated Christ, the lame Christ limping through Russia, begging His bread; the Christ who, all through the ages, might return to the earth and come even to sinners to win their compassion by His need. Now, in the flash of a second, I knew that this dream is a fact . . . Christ in [humankind]. . . .

I saw too the reverence that everyone must have for a sinner; instead of condoning his [or her] sin, which is in reality [their] utmost sorrow, one must comfort Christ who is suffering in [them]. And this reverence must be paid even to those sinners whose souls seem to be dead, because it is Christ, who is the life of the soul, who is dead in them; they are His tombs, and Christ in the tomb is potentially the risen Christ. . . .

Christ is everywhere; in Him every kind of life has a meaning and has an influence on every other kind of life. . . . Realisation of our oneness in Christ is the only cure for human loneliness. For me, too, it is the only ultimate meaning of life, the only thing that gives meaning and purpose to every life.

After a few days the “vision” faded. People looked the same again, there was no longer the same shock of insight for me each time I was face to face with another human being. Christ was hidden again; indeed, through the years to come I would have to seek for Him, and usually I would find Him in others—and still more in myself—only through a deliberate and blind act of faith.”

[Caryll Houselander, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* (Sheed and Ward: 1955), 137-140.]

Christ is Supreme. Christ is the Indwelling Reality in all of us and in all of Creation. Christ heals us and reconciles us, dies in us and rises in us. Christ will be all and in all.