

Today's the last Sunday of the church year, of Pentecost. Next week is the beginning of Advent, the beginning of the Season of Christ, which begins with the anticipation of the birth of the baby Jesus and finishes with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Pentecost also finishes with the crucifixion, as you probably noticed in the Gospel reading. This is a pretty powerful statement as regards the centrality of the Cross in what we believe. This morning we're going to highlight what Jesus said from the Cross and talk about what that has to do with our walk with him and one another.

OPENING PRAYER

In the Gospel we heard one of Jesus' last words from the Cross. He prayed, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).**

Forgiveness was probably the first thing we learned about Jesus, and for many of us, that was a long time ago. It's easy enough to begin to take the idea of forgiveness for granted, to minimize it, to make it something like a ticket to a movie: once you've got it, you're in, and there's nothing more to do with it.

But when we read from Paul's letter to the Colossians we see that forgiveness is much more dynamic than that. Paul wrote, **Colossians 1:13-20: (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**

Let me talk about how this affects our day to day lives by giving an illustration. A couple of weeks ago, Chapman University published its nationwide survey of what people fear the most. Here's the countdown of the Top 10 Fears:

- Numbers 9 & 10 tied with 35% of the people surveyed fearing credit card fraud and biological warfare;
- Number 8: 36% fear that someone they love will become seriously ill;
- Numbers 6 & 7 tied with 37% fearing a nationwide economic collapse and identity theft;
- Numbers 4 & 5 tied with 38% fearing government restrictions on firearms and that someone they love will die;
- Number 3: 40% fear not having enough money for the future;
- Number 2: 41% fear a terrorist attack;
- And number 1: 61% fear corruption of government officials.

Our fears are symptoms of the information we consume every day from the media that tells us there are threats to our way of life all around us, threats to our peace of mind and our sense of security, and even our own physical safety. Violence and warfare hang over our heads, and we fear that everything we've worked for may be turned to dust in a heartbeat.

But St. Paul wrote, **Colossians 1:13-14: (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

In our forgiveness there is deliverance from darkness; we dwell in the light; we are enveloped in the life **"of God's beloved Son."**

But the struggle goes on. The Chapman survey also included a Top 10 List of Conspiracy Theories. Here they are:

- Number 10: 24% believe the first moon landing was a farce;
- Number 9: 28% are suspicious about the death of Supreme Court Justice Scalia;
- Numbers 7 & 8: people who still don't believe President Obama was born in America tie with those who are suspicious about the origin of the AIDS virus at 30%;

- Numbers 5 & 6: people who believe there are plans for a one-world government tie with those who believe the government is concealing something about the North Dakota crash at 33%;
- Numbers 3 & 4: people who believe the government is concealing something about aliens from space tie with people who believe there's a conspiracy behind global warming at 42%;
- Number 2: 50% believe there's something fishy about JFK's assassination;
- Number 1: 54% of the people surveyed believe the government is concealing something about the 9/11 attacks.

You have probably heard about all of these conspiracies except the “North Dakota crash.” That’s because there wasn’t one. Chapman University made up that conspiracy. What this means is that people are generally pessimistic, paranoid, suspicious, and afraid.

Indeed, we are afraid of real things, and we are afraid of the make believe. The survey also included a question about the end of the world, finding that 23% of the people who believe in 8 to 10 of the conspiracy theories I listed—including the one that was made up – believe the world will end in their lifetimes. People are very afraid.

But Paul wrote, **Colossians 1:13-14: (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

These are encouraging words, that we have been delivered from “**the domain of darkness**” and “**transferred**” to the kingdom of God, that we’ve been redeemed and have received the “**forgiveness of sins.**”

And yet I think it’s too easy to minimize our Christianity with an overly simplistic understanding of what Jesus did for us, that he was only God’s sacrificial lamb who died for our sins. He was that, but he was and is so much more.

Following his declaration that we’ve received the “forgiveness of sins,” Paul wrote, **Colossians 1:15-17, “(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or**

authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

This is a very powerful declaration of Christ's divinity, that he's the firstborn of all creation, that he rose from the dead in order to remove our sin and to make us whole, that **"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** Let's let that settle in for just a moment.

Jesus is our Creator and our Sustainer; he set in motion the universe and he breathes life into it; he's behind the greatest stars in the heavens above and he directs the smallest atoms in the earth below; he is Lord over the worlds of men and angels; all things work together through him and for him.

"In him all things hold together": When Jesus died on the Cross he made the world whole again. There's no other way to say it: Sin unleashed a darkness that enveloped all of creation, and that darkness could not be overcome by the will of man, for humanity loved the darkness.

But Jesus came to us on the Cross and restored us, and **"In him all things hold together"**: This is the STICKINESS OF FORGIVENESS: When Jesus removed our sin, he recast us in the image of God as we were originally intended to be. His forgiveness holds us together from the inside out like spiritual superglue, which makes the things around us sticky too.

Let me give you a personal example: When I was in college I waited tables to pay the bills. The assistant manager at the restaurant had an ego that was about the size of Texas, and he wasn't even from Texas. Anyway, he was really hard to work with, and he generally made my life miserable from the moment I stepped on the floor until I left for the night.

My friend John asked me if I'd prayed about it, and I had to confess that I hadn't. So I did. Every day before I went to work I prayed that I would have patience and peace and that God would guide me. And I prayed for Todd.

And God answered my prayer, partly. Todd never changed. He remained as belligerent and mean as he always had been. But I changed. It didn't matter what Todd said, he didn't stress me out, frustrate me, or make me angry. His words to

me were like water off the back of a duck. And my experience made me sticky. From time to time I had the opportunity to share with others how God answered my prayers and had changed my heart.

That's the stickiness of forgiveness: Jesus revealed himself to me as my Lord and Savior, and I believed that his work in my heart was for today as well as for eternity, and he gave me a word of encouragement for other people.

How is your forgiveness sticky? Is it through your prayers? Your fellowship? Your acts of service? When we recognize that our forgiveness is not something we take for granted and allow to go dormant, it becomes a dynamic part of our heart, which changes other people's lives too.

Paul also wrote to the Colossians, **Colossians 1:18-20, "(Jesus) is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."**

Because Jesus is the **"firstborn from the dead,"** it is implicit that others will follow him unto eternal life. Paul is saying Jesus reigns in our church, that he guides us, that he fills us with hopes and dreams, visions and plans, and that he walks with us, lifting us up and filling us with everything we need to fulfill his mission in our community.

Without Jesus everything around us would collapse into chaos. Despair and sadness, tyranny and darkness would swallow us up. Anarchy would prevail and civilization would die.

But Jesus is with us. He is the image of God, the revelation of the fullness of God. He is over all Creation, and he is over the church, the wellspring of living water from which the blessings of God flow.

We can escape our fears by letting the STICKINESS OF FORGIVENESS pervade our hearts. When we pray in his name for peace of mind, we are proclaiming that his life lives in ours until he comes again. When we share with another person why we wakeup refreshed in the morning, we are letting the forgiveness of our sins

percolate up through our souls. When we can be encouraged in our hearts even when we've lost that which we held dear, we are proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week when the heartache and crises of the world threaten our peace of mind, let us cling to Jesus' words, "**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.**" We have been forgiven and God has pledged himself to us unto eternity.

This week when we feel that we are at our wit's end, when we feel alone and afraid, let us pray that the Lord would fill our hearts with peace, and joy, and love, those gifts of the heart that flow from the forgiveness of sins.

And this week let us share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of the Lord. Amen.