

**More than Nature
Colossians 1:15-20**

Well brothers and sisters in Christ, this morning we continue to prepare ourselves to participate in our Green Worship experiment coming up in November where we are going to shift our focus from looking at God's Word revealed in scripture – to look at God's word revealed to us in the creation.

Now, you would think that because of where we live – on the West side of Calgary, just a short drive away from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains with some of the most beautiful, spectacular scenery available on this planet – that Green spirituality would be easy for us.

And certainly if Green spirituality was limited to admiring God's handiwork in nature – then yes it would be.

But friends what makes Green spirituality and Green worship a bit of a challenge for us is that when the scripture speaks

about God's creation and how it can reveal God's word to us – it's talking about more than just nature.

Creation includes the arts; music, dance, painting, theatre, movies... It includes sports; even mixed martial arts and boxing... It includes technology, engineering, architecture and so much more... it even includes politics and political parties and politicians...

It's all part of the creation.

And friends the truth about being Green is that if we want to see and hear God's word in and through the creation it means that we have to engage with these areas of creation. We have to take the time and energy to concentrate on and become educated on how these other aspects of the creation work and function and what they are made up of.

We need to get familiar with their terminology, their quirks and quarks, how they relate to the rest of creation, and why

they fascinate and appeal to certain people, and why people love these things.

But brothers and sisters, it's not easy taking the time and energy to do this.

And ironically it's because we are so busy focusing in and working on whatever part of the creation appeals to us – in our career and family and what we do for recreation - that we have no extra time or energy to broaden our appreciation of God's creation outside of our limited area of expertise...

And as the saying goes "familiarity breeds contempt". So the wonder and excitement of what we do fades and we no longer experience our work and interaction with the creation revealing God to us.

Instead it has turned into the proverbial rat-race from which we seek to escape each week-end by fleeing to the beautiful natural scenery in the mountains.

And friends, I don't know about you... but when I'm in a place where familiarity has bred contempt in my heart with God's creation I feel tired... but not really tired, I feel like something's missing... but I can't quite put my finger on it, I have lots of options and things I could do... but nothing really appeals to me.

It's like what Jesus says in Matt 11:16-17 *"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'"*

People who use the English language better than I do call this a state of torpor, languor or ennui. We might better understand it as blasé lethargy of sorts or maybe best described by the grunge rock band Nirvana as *"teen spirit – here we are now... entertain us!!!"*

Brothers and sisters in Christ – when our sinful nature has affected us in this manner and closed us off to the wonder of

creational revelation, we are tempted, and often give into the temptation, to use the creation to revitalize ourselves – to restore that sense of vitality and wonder and feel like we are really living, like we are really alive.

And as I have experienced it, I would describe it as looking for something that will reach in and grab me and make me interested so that I don't have to put forth any effort or engagement. I want something that just makes me come alive... without me having to do anything.

And so we seek spectacle, bigger, better, louder, faster, more incredible, and more amazing – here I am world... entertain me! Make me feel alive – and if you succeed; I'll be your fan, I'll watch your show, I'll stay at your resort, I'll make you my hobby and my passion – you'll be my guilty pleasure.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Has anyone experienced this? Do you see how this characterizes much of our society and is one of the driving forces in our economy?

And can you see how this demand which we put on creation to make us feel alive and how we might use it in this way is very different from engaging with the creation to see how it reveals God to us?

Brothers and sisters it's important that we are able to see and understand this difference, because otherwise our understanding and experience and ability to participate in and benefit from Green spirituality will stay within the narrow limits of what we call nature – and we are prevented from growing in our relationship with God by this idolatry.

And I call it idolatry because even though we may have turned away from seeking life from man-made things and we do not trust in the work of our hands to save us but we trust in Christ instead – the fact that we still categorize God's creation into that which is "man-made" vs. that which is "natural"

And the fact we can only "see" God in nature – because man obviously had nothing to do with creating it... is still idolatry because it allows man-made things continue to function as

idols through our disengagement with them and in our treating them as necessary evils that we must endure but which don't really reveal God to us like nature does.

Do you understand what I'm saying here?

Now last week - as we looked at how God wrote two books to reveal himself to us with, we learned that the scriptures function as glasses or lenses which brings our understanding of the creation into focus so that we can see clearly and correctly how it reveals God to us.

So this morning we're going to take a little time and effort to engage with the scripture passage we read from Colossians to see how it brings the creation into focus and helps us see clearly that creation includes much more than nature and how Christ's redemptive work actually prompts us to come full circle and re-engage with the "man-made" parts of creation so they are no longer idols but instead reveal God to us.

So Col 1:15 starts off with Paul stating that the Son is *"the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."*

And while we might think this verse is all about stating that Jesus Christ is fully God and has all the rights of God as creator in His relationship with creation – the terms Paul uses also tie Jesus Christ back to the very first person created in the image of God and Adam's relationship with the creation.

And in fact Paul's makes a number of additional references in vs. 16-17 which also send us back to that initial act of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Like *"heavens and the earth"* and *"all things have been created through him and for him and He is before all things..."*

And so if we follow Paul's references back to Genesis 1 and 2 here and do a bit of studying and research on God's act of creation and creating Adam and Eve in his image and placing them in the Garden of Eden as His stewards– we will discover that there are three creative acts or movements of God.

The first is Genesis 1:1 *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Full Stop.

Then really there ought to be a very large space – or we ought to start a new chapter or something like that – so that we see this is a short but complete full summary of creation here. God made it –end of story.

But we can’t end the story there – God wants to reveal himself to us through scripture in a particular way that creation can’t, so scripture illuminates a secondary account of creation from Gen 1:2 to 2:3 which shows us how through His Word God speaks everything into existence. The boundaries and spaces of our reality are defined and set in place and then filled with content – with created things – creatures.

So the six days of creation are three days of creating spaces, and three days of filling those spaces and it culminates with God creating human beings as male and female.

And we usually we stop right here friends – so that what we understand and call creation is defined by what God brought into existence at that point, what we typically call the natural world – or nature.

But there is a third creative act or movement of God. It is hinted at, or rather the foundation for it is set in the second creation account when God makes male and female in His own image and gives them dominion over the creation.

And as the second creation account comes to a close with God resting and taking a Sabbath from His creative work – it sets up the rest of Gen chapter 2, when He plans Adam in the Garden Eden, to be seen as God handing over His creating process to those whom made in His image. Effectively God commissions them to continue it – as his representatives, with certain boundaries in place.

So if we view the creation around us through the glasses of these scriptures it means we won’t see a distinction between man-made vs. God made anymore.

Instead, because we know who humans really are – representatives of God, imagers of God... we'll understand that what they create can be understood to be made as by God himself – and thus right from the beginning creation has included more than nature.

And that is why Paul can describe such a wide scope in Colossians 1 when it comes to his description of “all things” in vs. 16. Maybe it helpful to envision what Paul wrote like this

In Him ALL things were created
In Heaven and on earth
Visible and invisible
Whether thrones, powers, rulers, authorities
ALL things were created through Him
And for Him

Visually laid out this way we can see how it is an all-encompassing diagram that embraces all that we can encounter or imagine in this universe.

Now Paul has to make sure that he specified created beings such as angels and demons in this diagram – that's what the reference to thrones, powers, rulers and authorities is all about – because the Colossians were being tempted to turn to these rather powerful and amazing creatures instead of Jesus Christ.

So by showing how Christ is actually above and before and superior to angels and demons, and revealing them as mere creatures – albeit amazing and powerful creatures – Paul undercuts the idolatry the Colossians were being tempted with.

If Paul were writing this passage to us today he would specify other things that we have come to believe are amazing and powerful – an in many respects are – which we are tempted to worship and trust instead of Christ.

He would say all things – whether technology, or economics, education or military might – all things have been created through Christ and for him – and hold together in Him.

So again – using this scriptural revelation as glasses to bring the creation into focus – whenever we see a powerful force shaping things in our world and commanding people’s allegiance and devotion – like we often see economics and technology do

We don’t need to be all anxious – these are merely creatures – as Paul says in 1 Cor 8:4 *“We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.”*

The truth is that the One who commands our allegiance and devotion created them, in fact they can only do what they do because they hold together in Christ – and... (this is important) they were made for Him.

That’s why Paul calls Christ the *“firstborn over creation”* in this passage. Just as the firstborn had the rights to receive all the inheritance of His father – Jesus Christ has the rights for and will receive ALL of the creation – and that is more than just nature.

So – that’s all nice, but what does this have to do with us and our Green worship experiment?

Well brothers and sisters in Christ – are we not the body of our Lord and Savior? Are we not His church - as Paul implies in vs. 18?

Yes we are... and so we need to understand that the one who we call Savior and Lord is in fact the one through whom and for whom ALL things were created and who will inherit ALL things.

And we also need to understand - according to vs 20 – that God’s purpose in Christ’s crucifixion on the cross was not only to pay for our sin and redeem us so that we become part of Christ’s body – but also to *“reconcile to himself [God] ALL things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”*

And if this is who our Head is, and what his crucifixion accomplished – what implications does that have for us who

are His body and as 2 Cor 5:18 says, have been given the ministry of reconciliation?

Well brothers and sisters that is what our Green worship experiment is meant to help us experience – so that we are equipped to go and work at reconciling ALL of the creation back to the Creator in our day to day lives.

And while we can engage and explore the scriptures together when we gather for Sunday worship – and hopefully I’ve helped you see how God’s word in scripture calls us to live this way – the gap between theory and successful practice here is massive.

I mean calling our attention to how our sinful nature makes us dull to how creation reveals God and how we are then tempted to use the creation in idolatrous ways to revitalize ourselves apart from God - that’s a necessary first step.

We need to be aware of that so we can resist that temptation and instead ask the Holy Spirit for the invigoration to not take any shortcuts and do the hard work of engaging the creation.

But to be honest we may not know how to engage the different parts of creation so that as Paul says in vs 17 we are able to see how all things cohere and hold together in Christ, and thus reveal God and His truth to us.

You see friends, that is why exploring Green spirituality and Green worship on Sunday morning is so important.

And what we are shooting for in November is to take what is supposed to happen outside of the Sunday worship service – where we see ALL of creation revealing God to us, and somehow facilitate that experience to occur inside Sunday worship so that you know what it is like.

And brother and sister this is not because we have become lethargic in our regular worship practices and we’re looking to

introduce novelty and spectacle to revitalize things in an idolatrous way in our worship...

No, this is so that we can learn through practical experience, to go beyond just hearing someone talk about it - how to discover creational revelation in our day to day life.

In order that we can truly be a Body which is in line with the true nature of its Head and so that we can participate fully in the ministry of reconciliation.

Applying it not only to our fellow, but fallen, stewards but also to the our culture, to sports, to business and economics, and even to politics – so these creatures will cease to become idols but can be prepared for that great and glorious day when our Lord Jesus will return and claim ALL of His creation for renewal - the new heaven and the new earth.

Brothers and sisters, at that time, let us not be found having left **any part** of the creation out of God's plan of redemption.

For God so loved the Cosmos – the beautiful arrangement of creation – that He sent His only Son... (John 3:16)

Amen.