

Parish Eucharist  
Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024  
**A bigger picture of Christ....**

Proverbs 8:1, 22-31  
Colossians 1:15-20  
John 1:1-14

For the word of God in scripture  
For the word of God among us  
For the word of God within us  
Thanks be to God.

Earlier this week I came across a magazine article about how certain photos of well-known people have come to more or less define them, There was a picture of Winston Churchill – commanding and grumpy looking One of Neville Chamberlain clutching his ‘peace in our time’ paper on his return from Munich.

One of Tony Blair and George W Bush smiling together whilst out for a walk – a few months before Sept 11<sup>th</sup>, and the war in Iraq.

And the article went on to observe that the power of the image is so great that it can come to influence what we think about the person. It cited a photograph of Margaret Thatcher in a tank, which heavily influenced the view of her as “The Iron Lady”. And more recently, unfortunate photos of Ed Miliband and the bacon sandwich, or Theresa May’s rather robotic-looking “dancing.”

And it reminded me again of how our mental ‘picture’ of what someone is like influences – and limits - our understanding of who they really are. I’m sure there is (or was) far more to all these people than a single image can portray.

We’ve just heard again the wonderful Prologue to John’s gospel. Maybe you’re wondering why this is the set reading for this morning. After all – isn’t it a Christmas reading? Why do we need it again today? Is it just a neat final ending to the Christmas/Epiphany season which concluded with Candlemas last week?

Or is it – along with the Transfiguration next week, trying to encourage us to see something more about the person of the Trinity / aspect of God we are most familiar with – Jesus, Christ. To revisit our ‘picture’?

If I were to ask you describe Jesus, or Christ – I wonder what image would come into your mind?

Maybe pictures we have seen. And because Bibles for adults don't often have pictures, these are frequently pictures from our childhood. Or sometimes from stained glass. Or maybe from works of art, or film. Maybe they are our own mental images of stories we know – Jesus at a party, Jesus with Mary Magdalene in the garden, Jesus forgiving Peter.

The pictures of Jesus, Christ, which we've just thought about are largely pictures drawn from the gospels – pictures of Jesus' earthly ministry. And as we read them – unsurprisingly - we focus on his humanity – though with puzzling glimpses of something beyond. Stilling the storm, water into wine, healings, raising of Lazarus, resurrection, ascension even

Today's gospel and NT reading both in their own ways try to give us an idea of what lies behind those 'puzzling glimpses'. They look beyond the human Jesus to 'the Word', the second person of the Trinity, to his divinity. An idea which is much harder for us to latch on to, and to grasp.

They tell not so much of what Jesus *did* (past tense), but of who Jesus *is* (present tense).

So how can they help us to see beyond the mental images of Jesus Christ which we already have, and maybe catch a glimpse of a much bigger picture?

But first – just a note here. Jesus. Christ. The Word. These are all names used in the Bible for the same person. They are all interchangeable. Mostly we use Jesus, or Christ. Sometimes both – Jesus Christ. Christ just means Messiah – it's not Jesus surname. Neither is more personal or more formal, and both are ok. But this morning, I'm going to use the name Jesus

Let's start with John –  
Even the first three words are mind-bending....  
In the beginning...

Ok – just stop there a minute. How long?  
I wonder what you were doing this time yesterday?  
Last week?  
Last year

10 years ago

50 years ago (Feb 1974)

Some of us can go back further but not all – think “this place” when you can’t

War years – bombing of Brum

Victorian era – crinolines, empire, poverty, building of St James

Back through the Civil War, the Wars of the Roses, Norman Conquest, the

Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia to the Romans

Before them, the Iron Age, the Stone Age – this area was probably covered with trees – the great forests that covered most of the country.

1.5 million years ago – Ice

250 million years ago – land mass situated just N of the equator

540 million years ago – at S pole

On Lewis and Harris there are rocks 4 billion years old

Pre-geology

Big bang – ca 13.8bn years ago

In the beginning, across unimaginable spans of what we call time – the Word – Jesus – already was.

Jesus is unlimited and immense beyond our understanding. The ‘little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay’ has *been* since before time even began. And more than that – all that we know, or can ever know, and much more of which our rational minds remain unaware - came into being through him.

In the beginning – the being-ness of Jesus. The Word, the Christ, God, Jesus – just “is”. When we grasp this, can our response be anything other than awe and wonder?

Then Paul, in the letter to the Colossians picks up from there

Not only was Jesus intimately involved in creation, but he is at the heart of creation.

Colossians 1:16b,17

“God created the whole universe through him and for him. [Jesus] Christ existed before all things, and *in union with him all things have their proper place.*”

There is a reason why so much of this is written as poetry – it’s because the human words and concepts we have really can’t capture the reality of

God. Maybe a helpful – though inadequate - analogy is that of a spider’s web, with Jesus being the centre point.

The centre of the web holds the whole structure together -

- it gives shape and order
- everything points to it
- of all the parts of the web it is the first, the most important - it is vital, unsurpassed, supreme

Jesus is at the heart of all we know and experience. It all points back to him.

And then Jesus is the head of the Church. The “Church” as in ‘all the people of God’, restored to relationship with God by Jesus coming to live among us, his ministry, and his obedient and self-giving death and resurrection.

Not the head in the way that the Archbishop of Canterbury, or even the sovereign is the ‘head of the church’, but as the head of the body – seeing, hearing, understanding, co-ordinating. The source of life. Perhaps in all the Church’s squabbles and bickerings, we would do well to remember that.

So we’ve thought about the sheer “being-ness’ of Jesus across all eternity, and of the immensity of Jesus across time and space

We’ve considered Jesus’s part in the act of creation

And Jesus’s place at the heart of creation – some versions of the Bible refer to this as ‘the supremacy of Christ’ – and as the head of the people of God.

But why does all this matter?

First – as we’ve already noted – God - Jesus *is*, and there’s nothing we can do about it. True – we can try to overcome God, to ignore God, to put ourselves in the place of God – but God “is”, regardless. Immense beyond our unaided understanding. We owe it to God and to ourselves to work through how we are going to respond to Jesus.

Second - the more we can grasp this bigger picture of the divine Jesus, the more deeply we can appreciate and enter into the story of Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter. The temptations, the forces at play during the arrest and trials of Jesus, the spiritual as well as physical and emotional agony of the Cross. All that authority and power at Jesus’ command, yet restrained in

obedience to the Father's will that through him the whole universe should be brought back to God.

And then (beyond the experiences of the resurrection - death overcome, the strange post-resurrection appearances) - the ascension and the images of Jesus the King reigning in glory. Exercising his love, his power and his authority.

And third, as we think of Jesus at the heart of creation and the church – a deeper appreciation of what this might mean right here, right now, in the pain and mess of the world where evil is defeated, but is putting up a very strong rear-guard action.

Into this mess – personal and global and all inbetween – we have access to the love, the power and the authority of Jesus, to make a difference, both through our prayers and through our actions in the power of his Spirit.

So, to pull it all together

We've thought about our "picture" of Jesus.

We've used these readings to help us to think about the divine nature of Jesus.

The Jesus who *is*. Jesus there at the beginning of creation, the Word of God through whom all things were made, things we can see, and things we can't.

That he is the visible likeness of the invisible God, and the way back to God.

We've seen how he is the source of life, and how he is the first, the focal point which holds all things in their proper place.

And we've thought about how this "picture" of Jesus helps us to appreciate Lent, Holy Week and Easter in a deeper way. And about how it can help and inspire us in our daily lives as we pray and work to bring God's love and healing power into the turmoil and injustice of this world.

That's a lot of thinking. It's hard – trying to get a handle on the God who is ultimately beyond our understanding. You're entitled to have a lie down when you get home! And allow time and space for an even bigger picture of Jesus to develop in your inner being.

In a few minutes, we'll reiterate a lot of this in the Creed, and then we're going to sing the song "Meekness and majesty", which beautifully balances both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Maybe a good way to help us to begin to hold both together in a single, expanded picture of Jesus, Christ, our Lord.