

2 Before Lent: Colossians 1:15-20 and John 1:1-14

May I speak in the name of God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

Both our readings fall outside the category of narrative. They use words in a creative way, giving greater depth of meaning than that immediately present at first reading. They are poetry and hymn, words to be used in worship and praise, to be read aloud. There is some debate, especially about our Colossians reading as to which came first, the hymn used in early churches to describe the Son of God or the writings in the letter to Colossians. Either way the words became embedded and echo down the centuries.

The Nicene Creed in particular picks up on phrases of the epistle, and to some extent our Gospel too: Light from light, through him all things for made. Creeds are statements of beliefs, guiding principles of a religious faith, and these words guide us in our identity as Christians, echoing back down the centuries to those early churches.

The main thing however that our two texts this morning have in common, other than their poetic genre, is their focus on the identity of Jesus Christ. Both are texts of Christology, they explore the person, the nature and the role of Christ. The passage from John is the most assertive this Gospel gets, with firm statements about the Word and its identity. Describing the Word as God and with God, in the beginning and creator of all things, life and light, flesh dwelling among us.

Colossians continues these assertions and gives us the highest Christology of the New Testament; it expresses Jesus's identity as not only the man who walked among us in Jerusalem and Galilee but as God. It emphasises Christ's divinity and kingship, we can almost hear the trumpets sounds as he creates and rules over "thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities".

But Christ's kingship was not inherited by the death of a relative or an opponent. It was not won through the death of another, but through the cross and Christ's own death on the cross.

Both John and the author of the text in Colossians describe the power and supremacy of Christ, Christ's sufficiency over cosmic powers, Christ as the ordering force of reason and the organising principal of the cosmos. The one who was there in the beginning and through whom all things are made.

Christ is described as one who participates in the act of creation, as one who holds all things together and one who reconciles all things through death on the cross. An enormous juggling act of holding roles and titles, labels and identities, tasks and things in the one Christ.

But we are told with certainty: "in Him all things hold together". This juggling act that seems impossible is held together in Him.

Sometimes life feels a little bit like nobody is holding things together. Disparate parts of our life head in opposite directions, we are torn in our vocation to be a mother, father, daughter, son, student, teacher, in our working vocation and our relationships.

And in our world, it often feels like it needs someone with a bigger picture, with bigger hands to hold together the greed and gluttony with the exploitation and poverty, the soaring heat and wildfires with the storms and blizzards, the security and protection with the violence and destruction.

It is easy to imagine that no one is holding things together.

But the promise of our readings today, the promise of Jesus Christ is that things are held together. "All" appears in almost every sentence; everything is known and God is present for everyone.

Because God entered the world in flesh, the true light, we became children of God. We are precious to God, and God cares extravagantly and deeply for each one of us. God provides the things we need to overcome and holds all things together.

And this is a promise that cannot be shaken. That darkness cannot overcome.

The hymn of Colossians tells us that God was pleased. God felt joy and pleasure. I imagine it is the pleasure we feel when we find our stride but magnified. When we are so immersed in a task that we take delight in doing it. The joy we feel when we were in the right place at the right time doing exactly the thing God has called us to do.

When we place God before all things, in God's rightful place, and when we inhabit our identity as children of God, trusting that in Christ, all things hold together, we are living as God intends for us.

So when you next feel like things are a little out of control, and nothing feels held together, perhaps you can turn to these passages and remember the promises found in the identity of Christ. In the promise that all things are held together through him and rest in the knowledge that you are a beloved Child of God.