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Pentecost + 6 c

Rather than avoid today's rather challenging lesson from Colossians, I've been trying to wrap my little mind around statements like "Jesus is the first born of all creation. For by him all things were made." Let's see if we can figure out what this means and what difference it makes to us anyway.

This lesson reminds me of a tv series called "How the Universe Works." It makes the amazing findings of astrophysics accessible to people like me. It's hard for me to comprehend a universe that is 13.8 billion years old and 14 billion light years across, with such powerful forces.

On our small level, the laws of this universe dictate what we can do when we try to make gadgets. For example, the GPS on my smart phone has to apply what Einstein discovered about how speed and gravity make clocks on satellites run faster than clocks on the earth do. Either follow nature's strange laws, or your GPS is always wrong.

Now for Colossians. It says that the one by whom God made this universe is the same one who was born as a real human being, was crucified on a cross, and rose from the dead. How mind-blowing is that!?

Jesus is so much more than just a good man who had a bad end. He is so much more than just a wise man who taught people a better way to live. Rather, this very human Jesus was and is one with God the Father. He always has had this divine dimension that goes far beyond what my little mind can understand. In one way or another, he has been there before the big bang, at the big bang, and ever since.

Now, why do you think that the writer of Colossians bothered to say such things? I have a few ideas.

Back then, some people thought that a bad spirit made a bad creation and a good spirit would save us from it. Christians answered that our God made creation good. It's just that we humans were led astray, and evil was unleashed in our world. Rather than have a creator god against a savior god, we have one divine unity who both created us and saves us.

On the other extreme, there have been people then as now who thought that creation is divine, and some folk then as now have worshipped various supernatural beings. The popular version of this today says, "Find the god within your natural self."

Christians replied that God is separate from nature, as an artist is separate from a work of art, and that God alone is to be worshipped above all else. Proclaiming that Jesus was involved in the act of creation makes him the Lord over all spirits and over all nature.

Then, there's politics. Roman emperors claimed to be sons of god. When they died, they were honored as gods. Roman authorities would kill Christians for refusing to pray to the so-called divine emperor.

Against the deadly but temporary power of Rome, Christians hoped in Jesus both as the real and only Son of God and also as God the Son. This Jesus already began his reign over all creation, already has conquered death, and shall raise his followers from the dead when he comes again.

Jesus had predicted persecutions and trials until his rule is complete. So it's no surprise that so many horrible things have been happening in this world for so long.

So, even as the Romans were killing them, Christians still believed that this world shall be transformed when Jesus finally completes his triumph over all the forces of evil and death. The resurrection of Jesus means that this final victory already has been guaranteed

by the divine power that made this whole world in the first place. As a foretaste, God's Holy Spirit already is making us repentant sinners into a new creation, no matter how unfinished that process may continue to be.

The letter to the Colossians challenged Rome, challenged those who hatred nature, and challenged those who worshipped nature, supernatural spirits, or themselves. This letter asserted that the fullness of the invisible God became visible in Jesus of Nazareth, that all of nature had been created through him, and that nature shall be transformed into a new creation through him.

Then Colossians relates all this to how Jesus reconciles us and God the Father. Obviously, God hasn't finished with us yet. Our righteousness is not our own doing. Rather, it's the righteousness of Christ that covers us.

Yet, when Paul speaks of his sufferings for the sake of believers that he once had tried to exterminate, it's clear that God's new creation in us means real changes for us, so that we actually sacrifice for the Lord who sacrificed so much for us, and that we actually trust and obey Jesus above all others, for he is the true Lord of all creation,

Of course, it's not that our good works save us. Rather we do good precisely because the one who already saved us is at work in us.

We pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So we act on our prayer, hoping for divinely inspired willingness and wisdom, so that God's will may be done more and more through us in our little corners of God's earth. For God's new creation begins now with changing us who follow Jesus, and it concludes with renewing the entire universe.

Let's go back to "How the Universe Works" for a moment. Astronomers describe the extreme violence they see. They predict that the universe shall die from a big freeze, a big

crunch, or something other lethal process. As we painfully know, the violence and death of our universe are paralleled by the violence and deaths of us humans, as we see so often in the daily news. Science can see no further than the final victory of death over all that is.

We Christians see what science sees, and we believe in far more, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. We anticipate the day when the Lord who was present at the beginning of creation and who is with us now shall come again. We look to the day when he completes the victory that he already won when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. We hope in the day when he makes us mortal sinners and this dying universe brand new with eternal life. We celebrate this coming day whenever we gather together at this baptismal font, at this altar, or to hear God's Word.

May our Lord use our acts of worship, of witness, and of service, as flawed as they are, to bring the powerful grace of this day closer and closer through us. Amen

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