

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
Images of Jesus: Creator  
The Rev. Dr. John Judson  
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Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 1:15-20

They always took it to the dealership. My in-laws were dealership people. Whenever they needed their car looked at before a trip, or the oil needed changing, or the tires needed replacing, they always took it to the dealership. I have to say that I always found this to be curious because it was more expensive, and it always took more time. Yet they insisted on continuing this tradition. My impression from my conversations with them was that if a car company made it, then that same car company would know how to fix it. Which actually makes sense. After all, how many of us have hired someone to repair something because they were “factory trained”? I suppose we trust that if those who made it know more about it, then they ought to be able to fix it better than anyone else...which is why, actually, the believers in the city of Colossae had decided that Jesus was of little use when it came to fixing the world and so they had set him aside as being unnecessary in God’s restorative work.

I realize that that sounds a bit cryptic and perhaps even confusing, so bear with me. The church in the small city of Colossae, which is in modern day Turkey, was founded by some unknown evangelist or disciples who told the Gentiles there about this Jesus of Nazareth who had died, was raised and through whom a new kingdom was being established. This kingdom of the God of Israel would fix all that was wrong with the world. Instead of war, there would be peace. Instead of a socially stratified society, there would be equality. Instead of slavery and oppression, there would be freedom. And in this new kingdom, the Colossian Christians would be able to enjoy a fixed world. So far so good. But then something began to change. As Paul describes it, “a philosophy” began to creep into the teachings of the church. What this philosophy suggested was that only God could fix creation because only God made it; only God could initiate the Kingdom. This would make sense because the only scriptures they possessed were the Jewish scriptures that spoke of creation as an act of the God of Israel and not of Jesus. So even if Jesus were a great wisdom teacher, or a wonderful rabbi, and even if he were raised from the dead, he was still just a dude. He was simply a faithful human and nothing more. This led to the Colossians to set Jesus aside, believing that only the God of Israel could set things right.

It was into that situation then that Paul wrote his letter to them. And what he wanted them to know is that Jesus was not just a dude, though he was human. That he was more than a teacher of wisdom, though he was. That he could indeed help fix what was broken because he was the part of the creative team that brought it into being. Let’s listen again to some of his words. “*He*

*is the image, or ikon, meaning likeness, of the invisible God...for in him all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers; all things have been created through him and for him...for in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..."* What Paul wants them to understand is that Jesus was central to this remaking of creation because he was not only mysteriously present with God from the beginning but because he was intimately involved in the creative process that organized the universe. And not only that, but the restoration of a good world was possible because of Jesus' death and resurrection. As Paul puts it, "*God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.*" This was so because on the cross Jesus broke the power of sin that distorts the image of God in us all, making it possible for all persons to love God and neighbor. In the resurrection, he broke humanities' ultimate enemy, the power of death, by becoming the first born from the dead. The result of these two actions made possible the reconciliation of all things, meaning all peoples, nations, races, genders and even creation itself. In other words, the ones who brought this world into existence, are the ones who are fixing it. Jesus, the ikon of the living God, gave his life for the world, and he and the God of Israel who raised him from the dead, are working together to fundamentally change not just the world but the universe itself. Reconciliation and restoration are possible.

As I prepared this sermon, the title, Images of Jesus: Creator sounded about as interesting as dirt. It sounded like one of those esoteric discussions such as how many angels can you fit on the head of a pin, which was actually an ongoing discussion in the late Middle Ages. However, if we are to believe Paul, Jesus as creator is one of the great sources of hope for us and for humanity. He is a source of hope because as part of the creative creation team, Jesus not only had the power to begin the process of restoring this broken world but has begun its restoration. And, Jesus not only began the restoration work, but continues it in and through each of us. As Malcomb Gordon in his song, "Our Father is Waiting" sings, "how life is now is not how life will be." This is the message of Jesus as creator, that in his infinite love and grace, he is working in and through each of us to help remake this world into what it ought to be. Jesus as creator is fixing this terribly broken world.

My challenge to you for this week then is this, to ask yourselves, how am I continually connecting with Jesus, that he might fix what is broken in me, and through me to help fix the world?