**Reading: Colossians 1:15-20**

**15**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16**For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created by him and for him. **17**He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18**And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. **19**For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20**and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

George Bernard Shaw once described the USA and Britain as separated by a common language. You only have to think about how we differently use words like vest, pants and trunk to illustrate the point.

**Sermon**

Wherever we are, we all use words in a way that assumes the person listening understands them the same way as we do. I am doing that right now in this sermon. But sometimes there is a gap between what people are hearing, and what we think we are saying… That is especially true when it comes to language about faith.

Paul faced this problem when he was writing letters, such as the one we know as Colossians, which we had today. We might imagine him wondering what his listeners understood by the word “Christ” or “the Son”. He has opened his letter referring to himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus (1:1), and has talked of a colleague as a minister of Christ (1:7). Just before the section we heard read he tells the Colossians that they have been brought into the kingdom of the Son (1:13).

The man Jesus has touched many lives, inspired many followers, and the stories of his teaching and miracles were circulating in the early years of the church – probably not written down in any form that we would recognise at that stage. As well as those accounts, the story of his death and resurrection meant the early Christians were clear he was from God, but what did that mean?

Paul had met the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus in that famous life-changing encounter, and he must have spent a lot of time rethinking his beliefs and working out how to express what he had arrived in words. Crucially he must have wondered how he could describe the man Jesus, the risen Jesus Christ he had met that fateful day, and the Son at the right hand of the Father in heaven in a way that properly explained them and showed they were fundamentally connected.

In those few verses in Colossians, he captures several ideas, which are echoed in the first Chapter of John’s gospel (which was the another reading set for today).He says Christ Jesus is

* The image of the invisible God
* Was present at the start of all things
* Head of the Church
* Firstborn from among the dead
* Reconciler of all things

In other words, the human Jesus of Nazareth of history gives us a glimpse – a revelation – of something far greater than just a human being, and yet provides a means of relationship with God for humans. Although God is not in any sense limited to a human being, Jesus Christ gives us a contact point – a connection, an introduction and the offer of reconciliation to the God who is more than anything we could know or understand. And so he has made peace with us.

So the word “Christ” isn’t just a surname or a title for Jesus; it points to him representing and embodying far more than we could imagine, and yet who can be known by the very least of us.

And Jesus Christ himself is God’s ultimate ‘Word’ for us, and one that we won’t fully understand in a lifetime – whichever side of the Atlantic we find ourselves.

**Collect of the Day**

Almighty God,

give us reverence for all creation

and respect for every person,

that we may mirror your likeness

in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**