

“All Things Created Through The Word – Jesus!”

In my sermon based on our Lectionary Epistle Reading three years ago, I stated, “The Reading reminds us of the interrelatedness between Jesus Christ – God’s Son – ‘the Word’ and his role in the Creation and the bringing about of Life and Light.” I also said, **“Colossians and the Gospel of John have much in common with reference to what they both said about Jesus Christ’s role in Creating the Universe, Life, and Light.”** Three years ago, I did not delve deeper into those conclusions. However, this Sunday, we will be looking closely at the interrelatedness between the messages of **Colossians 1:11-20 and John 1:2-5, 9-10.**

Before doing that, as I have done on previous occasions, let me set the stage for the more general academic view of the Gospel of John. When I graduated from Eden Theological Seminary in 1977, most biblical academicians thought the Gospel of John was in a totally different category than the other Gospels in the New Testament. They and many today have believed it was written later than Matthew, Mark, and Luke – at least by 20 to 50 years. **They also thought John was a beautiful but theological creation, instead of an accurate gospel account of the Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.**

However, there are biblical academicians, who have concluded the Gospel of John is very historical and very accurate – is not a mere theological construction. I have done a rather deep study of the Gospel of John, especially during my Sabbatical around 15 years ago. **I agree with those, who have theorized the Gospel of John is an accurate and historical gospel.** The First Chapter of the Gospel of John is often referred to as the “Prologue”. As I mentioned earlier, like our Reading from Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, John 1 focuses on the Role of the Son of God – Jesus in the Creation. I read the Scripture from Colossians, so let’s take a few minutes to watch and listen to this video, which incorporates the Prologue from the Gospel of John. [Show, “The Word Became Flesh” video.]

Dr. Richard A. Burridge, an important Biblical scholar, has done a close examination of the Prologue of the Gospel of John, including how it was perceived by Jews during the time of the early Church. I heard Dr. Burridge make a presentation about the Gospel of John in which he demonstrated it would have been perceived as a biographical and historical account about Jesus when he presented that paper at an Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature about 15 years ago. Dr. Burridge, more recently, wrote a book, which is especially pertinent to our consideration of the Prologue of the Gospel of John. Beginning on page 240 of his book published in 2006, which is titled, The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple, Burridge wrote: **“Any Jewish reader of the Gospel would at once recognize the opening verses as a retelling or interpretation of the beginning of the Genesis creation narrative (Gen. 1:1-4).”** Burridge continued, “The opening words (‘In the beginning’) are identical with the opening word(s) of Genesis, and the impression of the retelling of Genesis would be furthered by the repetition of these words in verse 2, the reference to the creation of all things by the Word in verse 3, and the key words ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ in verses 4-5 (cf. Gen. 1:3-5). Retellings or interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative are common in Jewish literature of this period. Some of them were especially concerned with the monotheistic message that YHWH was the sole Creator of all things, who designed and accomplished his creation entirely by himself. In fact, it was a key element in the common Jewish understanding of God’s unique identity that he alone was the Creator of all things. This was perhaps the simplest way of making, as Jewish monotheism required, an absolute distinction between God and all other reality. God alone is Creator of all else; all other things were created by God.”

Dr. Burridge elaborated, **“John 1:3 echoes very emphatically this monotheistic motif: ‘All things came into being through it [the Word], and without it not one thing came into being.’”** Burridge stated, “That all things were created by God through the instrumentality of his Word is very commonly said in Jewish statements about the creation (beginning with Ps. 33:6).” **“It is simply a concise expression of the fact that in the Genesis creation account each act of creation is effected by God speaking.”** “Although Genesis 1 itself does not use the term ‘word,’ it is easily understood as saying that all things were created by God’s Word. When John uses the term ‘Word’ in the opening verses of his prologue, he means simply this: the divine Word that all Jews, on the basis of Genesis, understood to have been active in the creation of all things.” Burridge continued, “As

God's own word, it was intrinsic to God's own unique identity." "To say that all things were created by the Word did not compromise the belief that God alone was Creator of all things, since his Word belonged to his own identity." **"In fact, to say as John does that all things came into being through the Word is precisely to categorize the Word as belonging to the identity of God rather than to the creation."**

As the author of the Gospel of John did in the First Chapter, so also, the Apostle Paul focused on the Son of God – Jesus the Christ belonging to the identity of God the Creator in our Reading from the Letter to the Colossians. Let's compare the reports in the Gospel of John and Colossians:

Paul wrote in verse 15, "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things."

John wrote in verses 1-2, "In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God." Later in John 1:14 we are informed the "Word became a human being" – who was revealed by John the Baptist to be Jesus – the Messiah – the Christ.

Continuing our comparisons between the creation accounts in Colossians and John:

Paul wrote in verses 16-17, "For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him. Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place."

The Gospel of John continued in verses 3-5, "Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of Life, and this Life brought Light to people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out." As we see in comparing those two groups of verses, it is through the essence of the Son of God – Jesus Christ – the "Word" that all things were created!

Both sets of the comparisons of what was included about the role of the Son of God in the creation by Colossians and John are extremely similar. **How did they come to have such close reports?** As Dr. Burrige explained, Jews would have recognized John's account as a typical retelling of the Creation Story found in Genesis and other places in the Old Testament. However, the retelling of the Creation Story by Paul and John are so close, another explanation is appropriate. That revelation is **Paul may have remembered an oral teaching from the Disciple John about Jesus being the Creative Instrument of God's Creation from when Paul visited with John in Jerusalem.** Later, John wrote down that teaching in what some call "The Prologue" of John 1. The Apostle met with John prior to when he wrote Colossians, so it seems to me, Paul may have retold much of what John had shared with him. **If that is what happened, then the authenticity of the Gospel of John and the early existence of an important part of its contents has been demonstrated.**

Further, if my hypothesis is correct, it not only validates the historical accuracy of the Gospel of John but, also, it and the similar Creation Accounts, affirm the Truth of Jesus' Reign over our lives and Creation, especially over the Body of Christ – the Church. **Let us celebrate and actively play our own roles by living, trusting, and declaring what Paul wrote in verse 20a, "Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to Himself."** Let's trust this bringing the "whole universe back to" God's Self has already been realized for our departed loved ones and friends, as well as, will be realized for ourselves and for all people yearning for God's Love and Unity. Amen.