

“How Big Is Your Jesus?”

Colossians 1:9-23 ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's¹ will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled¹ you² to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in¹ him all things in heaven and on 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. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in¹ him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

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Biola University in Los Angeles (Bible Institute of Los Angeles) is home to a mural entitled “The Word” but affectionately known as “The Jesus Mural”. It is a humongous Jesus painted on the side of a building in such a way as to make you feel like he is towering over you. In the mural Jesus is standing there with a Bible in his hands offering it out to you while looking up towards the sky. Biola's Jesus is two stories tall. Dana has a picture of herself standing at his feet and she barely makes it halfway up the shins. Out at Biola University they have a pretty big Jesus. As far as academic institutions, Biola has the biggest Jesus I know of. Unfortunately, Biola's Jesus and his offer of the Bible only says that Jesus has some truth to give us rather than he himself is the Truth. Biola's slogan is “Biblically Centered Education”. I would rather like to hear them say “Christ Centered Education” because their subtle shift from Jesus being the center of Truth to the Bible being that keeps them from knowing and confessing God as Trinity. Lacking that confession they actually cease to confess and teach the Christian Faith and have replaced it with what they call the Evangelical Faith. Therefore, at Biola they suffer from idolatry of the Book.

As far as cities go, I'm sure you all have seen pictures of the giant Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Roman Catholics built it in 1931 for only \$250,000. It would probably cost over a billion today. It stands a whopping 39.6 meters (130 ft) atop the 700 meter (2296 ft) Corcovado Mountain. Its size, outstretched arms, and location give the impression that Jesus rules and loves this city if not the whole nation of Brazil and welcomes the world to come to his city. I like that giant Jesus. It's more scriptural than Biola's Bible-bearing Jesus. As Paul says in Colossians Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In looking to Jesus we see God for in him all the fullness of God – Father, Son, Holy

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Spirit – was pleased to dwell. This Jesus is the firstborn of all creation meaning he is the firstborn son or having the highest rank of all creation. By and for him all things were created. He is before or in front of all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body of the church. In his resurrection he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead and has supremacy in everything. In him, in his very self, and through him God has reconciled all things to himself; all people, all places, all times, all things. That’s what the Christ the Redeemer statue reigning over Rio says; kudos to the Catholics for getting it right.

As far as church buildings go, it seems that the big Jesus has been supplanted by the big steeple, a building edifice pointing up to a generic whatever. There’s nothing that tells us anything about God; no Jesus, no Bible. Well, sometimes there is a cross which would lead us into a discussion of idolatry of the cross which, be thankful, I will abstain from. There’s just this pointing up to whatever. As far as anything in the area of Caledon is concerned, here at Claude we have the biggest steeple around. Yippee. Now, one would think that “churches” rather than academic institutions and cities would be in the market of having the big Jesus especially like the one down in Rio. Does it say something about “churches” that they/we have opted for big steeples rather than a big Jesus? Could it be that we just don’t have the “big” picture of Jesus? Maybe our Jesus is just too small. I mean this in no disrespect to our Lord but I think that our conception of Jesus hinges mostly on what he has done for us in dying for us to reconcile us to God rather than on who he is as the image of the invisible God in whom all the fullness of God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – was pleased to dwell; the firstborn over all creation meaning he is the firstborn son or having the highest rank of all creation; the one by and for whom all things were created and who is before or in front of all things and in whom all things hold together and as such he is the head of the body of the church, the one who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead and therefore has supremacy in everything. It is through this very big Jesus that God has reconciled humanity to himself by his death on the cross and indeed it is this very big Jesus that reigns over all powers, rulers, and authorities whether they be visible or invisible. All creation answers to Jesus. When we pray it is in, through, and with this very big Jesus who in his self holds all things together and by and for whom indeed all things were created. This is staggering if you can glimpse it.

We have a very difficult time thinking this big with respect to our Lord and the result is that we have reduced him to being simply someone who died for us to make things right between us and an angry, putout God who has nothing better to do than judge people’s sins. It may very well be that we’ve opted for steeples pointing up to a generic whatever because we don’t want to know what that false image of God looks like and so we say just look up at the etherealness of clouds and or if there’s a cross at the top of the steeple we look up saying the cross makes peace for us with that God. The problem with idolatry of the cross is that it, the cross doesn’t show us who God is, not in the same way that the giant Jesus overlooking Rio de Janeiro does. The giant Jesus in Rio is shaped like a cross to indicate that we don’t know what the cross is until we know who Jesus is. We can’t begin to understand what his death for us means unless we

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really catch a glimpse and grasp how really big our Jesus is. The one who died for us is God the Son the only begotten Son of the Father who in his birth to Mary became the firstborn son over all Creation and in his resurrection became the firstborn son over the new creation. This is the one who in selfless love gave his life for us and to us.

Today it is Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday on which we celebrate the rule or reign of our Lord, who reigns in love over us with outstretched arms revealing God to us, that God is known personally in giving of oneself in love even unto death. The steeple on top this church cannot tell this to the community around us only we, the congregation, can in freely giving of our loving fellowship in Christ even if it means we die or cease to exist as a church. This is Christ's ministry through us, his giving of himself through us.

Today we also are ordaining and installing a new elder. This is an important act in the reign of Christ in this fellowship. In the Presbyterian Church elders are the ones who discern the Lord's leading of us in his ministry. Whether or not the elders of know this very big Jesus and his ministry and can discern it in our midst and lead us in is the hinge of renewal in this Presbyterian church. If you remember from our reading from Luke, it was the leaders of the people who led the people and soldiers in sneering at Jesus and mocking him. In our reading of from Jeremiah, it was the leaders, the shepherds of the people who destroyed and scattered the sheep. If the leaders of a church, indeed, this church do not know who Jesus is and cannot discern his ministry of self giving love unto death in our midst which creates the very communion we share and must freely give away; then this church, indeed this church, will become something other than a church, the living body of Jesus Christ who is our head.

This congregation and particularly its leadership have a decision to make. We must decide whether we are going to be the big steeple with a sign in the middle of nowhere on Highway 10 pointing up to a generic God whom we only know in a very smallish way or be the living, loving community of the big Jesus who is giving his life to the world through our dying to self. We must decide whether we are going to give the love of Christ that dwells freely in our midst away freely to the community around us with no ulterior motives even if it means the death of this congregation. We need to decide to set aside survival mode and get on with dying to be the church of Jesus Christ that it is. The only way that a church can be the true church, the living body of our Lord is to take up the cross and follow him. This means we must decide in every decision that we make that we are going to die to ourselves, die to our big steeple idolatry of the cross, and let everything that we do be an act of self-giving love in the ministry and reign of Christ even if it means our pews keep getting emptier which I don't believe they will because God is faithful to true faithfulness. It is our Jesus, the Lord of all Creation who laid it out to his disciples the first leaders of his church about how things are going to be in his creation, in his church by saying “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” So, what's it going to be? Amen.