

We Believe: Son of God, Son of Man  
Scripture: John 1:1, 14-18; Colossians 1:13-20

Good morning! It is amazing that we are able to meet together today. The extraordinary events of the past few weeks have forced all of us to rethink how we do life as usual. We always talk about how even though we are many, we are one in Christ; and today we are experiencing that oneness and that many-ness in new ways. Even though we are worshipping together online for the time being, the church is alive and acting—both here on C St and everywhere each of you are!

Our family loves puzzles and games. How about you? Games and puzzles can be great diversions while social distancing! Yesterday Alice and I were working a crossword with one of our daughters who was on the phone in Los Angeles! I can't believe that she can do crosswords without seeing the puzzle! My mom loved games—but she was really cutthroat! You played Parcheesi with her and you took your life in your hands! It didn't matter if you were 6 years old, you better learn to play at her level!

She also loved jig saw puzzles. I remember lots of holidays where a card table was set up with a HUGE puzzle spread across it—a thousand pieces or more. Sometimes we needed more space and moved to the dining room table! An unfinished jig saw puzzle is a mess, right? It is just a jumbled pile of pieces. It seems impossible to put them together. What keeps us from giving up was the picture on the box. There was Zion Canyon in all its splendor! *That* was what all those pieces could become. The picture on the box made it possible for us to sort through the chaos of the mixed-up pieces. Without the picture the confusion would have overwhelmed us. Pastor Eugene Peterson points out that the Scripture, and especially the passage from Colossians we just read, acts like that picture for us in our chaotic world. It gives us a picture—Jesus Christ is the one who holds it all together. He is the one who makes all the different pieces fit together. In him everything finds its purpose.

I know that the world seems crazy right now. Literally every day we are getting new information, it feels like nothing is certain. I have good news for you today First Pres—Jesus is

with us. He is not far away. God isn't ignoring us. Jesus is with us and he will never, ever leave us. We will work through the chaos of this moment, looking to Jesus, who holds everything together. Friends, we don't have to be afraid.

Our current sermon series focuses on what we believe as Christians. We are being guided by the Apostles' Creed, that amazing ancient confession of faith that organically grew from the practice of the earliest believers. Last week Pastor Chris shared about God the Father—the creator of all things. This week we are talking about God the Son—Jesus Christ. Our savior, our Lord, the pattern we look to so we can make sense of our mixed-up world. The one who holds everything together, so we don't have to live in fear. Our main take aways today can be summed up as Jesus is Immanuel, God with Us. He is a person. He is truly God, and yet he became fully human. And he saves us. **(slide up)** Because of that we don't have to be afraid, we can move in faith, not fear. We can be energized even right now to live out his Kingdom.

The heart of the faith that the Apostles' Creed reveals is not a doctrine, it is not dogma, it is a *person*. It is Jesus. The Creed is just 3 paragraphs long—you can download a copy of it from our homepage to look at it—one about the Father, one about the Son and one about the Spirit. The middle and longest part is about Jesus. The very earliest Christian statement of faith was "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord. The very name Jesus means God Saves, so that first confession really means that Jesus is our Lord and Savior—the same thing that we say today when we get baptized or join the church. The heart of our faith is not an idea or a world view—it is Jesus.

This Jesus is not just another leader or a good teacher. Both of our scriptures today make that clear. The beginning of John tells us about the Word. The Word who was with God and who was God. The Word who made everything. The Word who became flesh and lived among us. This Jesus, who is somehow both God and Man! Remember that John's Gospel is not a legend written down centuries later—scholars agree that it gives us an eyewitness account of Jesus' life. Can you imagine anyone saying things like this about someone that they knew, who they'd walked with, eaten with, gone fishing with?

Our second reading today from Paul's letter to the Colossians just as clearly shows Jesus is God himself. Listen to how the Message puts it:

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—*everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone.

So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross. Paul can't stop exclaiming how amazing Jesus is—yesterday, today and forever!

We start with the reality that Jesus is, in fact, God. But Jesus was not satisfied leaving us in our mess. No, Jesus came down to rescue us. To be our Savior as well as our Lord. To reconcile everything and redeem all of creation out of our brokenness. To do that Jesus emptied himself. He didn't just show up *looking like* one of us—he became a human being.

One of the really striking things about the Creed is that most of what it says about Jesus is his *story*. Not doctrine or teaching or ideas. The Bible story is the Israel Story that came to its fulfillment in the Jesus Story. The most important things to know about Jesus are the facts of his life.

Jesus stepped down from his eternal relationship with the Father and the Spirit and into our world, into our lives. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary. I know—some of you are balking at the virgin birth. That's ok—don't let your doubts stop you-- just stick with Jesus and see where he takes you. But—if God can speak the universe into existence, fertilizing an egg does not seem too hard. Jesus came into our world as one of us. From the almighty to a baby in a womb. *Totally* vulnerable. Why would he do that? Why

would he risk so much? Researcher Brene Brown conducted thousands of interviews and found that we cannot have connection with other people without vulnerability. The key to connection is vulnerability. She says there can be no intimacy—no emotional intimacy, no spiritual intimacy, no physical intimacy—without vulnerability.

Why did Jesus make himself so extremely vulnerable? For connection—so he could connect with us. Vulnerability is the cost of love. As we move through these next days and weeks of this virus, many people are feeling vulnerable. This is a chance for us to serve. To connect and to help. Reach out to your neighbors, find out their names and numbers and then check in on them and see how they are doing. Do they need anything? As we are vulnerable, connection becomes possible. That is how the church works.

Jesus' vulnerability showed up in his life. He suffered. He suffered just as any of us do—pain, sorrow, sickness, loneliness, betrayal, fear—you name it. As we go through this time of uncertainty, of worry, of danger—Jesus is with us. He's been through it too. He understands. He is right here with us, down in the muck. Jesus suffered. He even calls us to suffer too. But with Jesus, suffering is never the end of the story.

Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Some people used to think Pilate didn't exist—that he was just made up. BZZZZ. Nope! **(slide up)** A few decades ago a stone was found with an inscription from Pilate. Same guy, same job, same time. The Gospel is a fact, not a theory. It is grounded in history. We believe in a particular human life—Jesus, who suffered under Pontius Pilate.

He didn't stop with suffering though. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. He identified with us all the way. He was vulnerable even to death. Jesus understands your pain and suffering. He literally has been there before us. He is God *with* us—Immanuel.

Jesus descended into hell. There is no limit to how far Jesus will go to identify with us, to connect with us. Jesus is fully human. He experienced our vulnerabilities and weaknesses to the full. But he didn't stop there. On the third day he rose again. **(next slide)**. This is an icon the Orthodox church uses of the resurrection. Jesus has broken down the doors of hell and he is pulling the dead out of their graves. As Jesus rises, all of humanity rises too! Through the cross and resurrection Jesus opens the way for us to be with him. Jesus' story didn't stop at

Easter, it continues today. He ascended to be with the Father again. The church father Irenaeus said that Jesus united himself with our human nature in order to unite us to God. Jesus' goal is uniting us with God! Through his suffering he saves us and opens the way for us to be with God again.

Jesus didn't just go to heaven; he is enthroned there. He is ruling there, right now. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, the place of ultimate power and authority. The one who made himself vulnerable so he could connect with us is the one who is ruling. That is who we worship. Right now he connects us with God, he reconciles us, and he holds everything together, even when things feel out of control. **(next slide)**

The Creed also points us ahead to the future—to the end of the story—when Jesus comes again to put everything right at last. To right all the wrongs and to burn away all the impurities in us. We don't need to fear this either. The face of God is Jesus' face. That one who went all the way to the grave for you is the one who will finally set you free from anything dead in you-- so you can live fully and joyfully. So you can flourish. On that last day we'll finally be able to see the full truth of our lives, and we'll see that we are loved. That is the fundamental truth about you—Jesus is crazy about you. **(next slide)**

Jesus made himself totally vulnerable for you. He went to hell and back—for you. He saves us. We don't have to be afraid. Because of all of that, we are empowered to go and live out those Jesus-shaped lives that he made us for. Each of us can be outposts of his Kingdom in our neighborhoods and workplaces and schools.

Even as we are in the whirlwind of news about the coronavirus, Jesus is still Immanuel, God with us. Over the last couple of days our deacons were calling everyone to get the word out about our worship change. Because of this virus we connected with almost everyone in our directory! We got to renew relationships and show people that they mattered. We got to learn of needs and ways we can help. We are working out ways to stay in touch better going forward. This emergency is helping us to love one another--to be the church -- BETTER than before! Even though we can't meet together in large groups for a while, we now can worship with people of all ages who often can't make it to church. Alice was calling people and heard from a young family who struggle to get here with their kids as well as from seniors who have trouble

getting out in the winter and from people who are too sick to come to church. They were all so happy to be able to join us in worship again! This virus jumpstarted our online worship!

The first Christians, trusting in this Jesus who is God with us, did not flee the plagues of their time. They stayed and they served. Sociologist Rodney Stark shows in his book *The Rise of Christianity* that caring for people stricken with the plague was a big contributor to the astounding growth of the church in the first few centuries. How are **we** called to serve our neighbors today? What will they remember about Christians after this virus is past?

In Jesus we see what God is really like—the image of the invisible God as Paul said. And we see ourselves—what we were made to be. What we could be like. Jesus is the picture that pulls together all the mixed-up pieces of our lives. He helps us make it through scary times. Friends, you don't have to be afraid. No matter what the news brings, no matter the diagnosis, no matter the 401k balance—Jesus is ruling and will see us through. He's been there, he is watching out for us, and he is calling us to love our neighbors, now more than ever. You can rest easy—Jesus means God Saves, and he is God with us, Immanuel. Right now.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus—thank you. Thank you for coming to save us. Thank you for being with us right now through whatever life throws at us. And Thank you for coming to put everything right at the end. Help us to trust you. Help us to walk with you. And empower us to live for you today. Send us out to share your love with our neighbors, even as they are also afraid and alone. Help us to truly be your church this week. Amen.