

What is your fixed point?

A sermon given on the the Second Sunday before Lent, 7th February 2021, by the Curate , the Revd Tim Kelly, in the Attended and Online Communion Service.

Colossians 1:15-20

What is your fixed point? What do you focus upon when all around seems in a state of flux? An ice skater that has been moving very quickly and spinning at speed and then needs to stop on the ice, will find and focus upon one object in the auditorium that doesn't move, that is fixed, and then trains their eyes, their focus, upon that spot. That helps them to adjust quickly, orient themselves in order that they can then move on.

So what is your fixed point?

One of the phrases that I know people are beginning to loathe, is this is 'the new normal'. 12 months ago, though perhaps there was some growing signs, almost none of us knew what was going to hit us. Since that time, so many have been through so much: doctors; nurses; teachers; some have struggled with illness; some have lost loved ones; all of us have had to adapt to different ways of being; lockdown; wearing masks; homeschooling; Internet shopping; zoom calls; being apart from friends and family; and so much more. Now, if we stop still for a moment to think about it all, just like that ice skater who's just stopped spinning, it's dizzying. So when the world is swimming and spinning around our heads, what is our fixed point?

One of the reasons why I'm not a huge fan of that phrase, 'the new normal' is that we already seem to have had several versions of 'the new normal' already - is this 'the new normal' where we're allowed to travel or the one where we're supposed to stay close to home? Is this 'the new normal' where GCSE and A-level students are going to be tested and have exams or the one where they're not? Is this 'the new normal' where we have vaccine jabs four weeks apart or 12 weeks apart? 'The list goes on. To quote one of my favourite songs, *'The only thing that seems constant is this accelerating rate of change'*. Change is difficult. Change can be frightening, stressful and intimidating for us as humans. To cope with change, we need our fixed points. I was in an online meeting recently where somebody said they loved change. It's a rare thing to hear, but I would suggest that even for those people, you will find that they have their strong fixed points, their strong anchors, that allow them to navigate the process of change, whether that be their family, their home, their pets or their career.

So what are your fixed points?

Well, today's reading from Colossians reminds us of our ultimate fixed point as Christians, Jesus. The letter writer of Colossians is writing to the church in Colossae at a point where they were in serious danger of losing sight of who Jesus was: some were beginning to turn their fledgling Christian faith simply into an ideology, a philosophy. In their view, Jesus's teachings were about a way of being, a way of doing life, nice words for a rule of life. And this reading crashes into that situation and makes a crucial course correction: 'Don't you get it?' the letter writer says, 'Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is what God looks like. He is God.' Now, in times like this, in times of international, national, local and perhaps personal crisis, it's understandable that people would feel prompted to ask that question, 'Where is God?' People long for and search for that which we cannot see, the invisible God. But we are reminded that if you need to know what God looks like; whether he cares about us; whether he cares about what is happening in the hospitals; whether he cares about the patients in the ICU beds struggling for breath; whether he cares about the anxious or the lonely: we can look to Jesus - what was he like? What did God look like when Jesus was on earth? What did God's love and compassion look like? Jesus shows us.

But there's more to this, our fixed point, our frame of reference, than simply that. Jesus isn't merely a companion with us on our journey, comforting though that may be: he is the beginning of all things and the restoration of all things. He is, just as it's shown on our altar frontal here, the Alpha and the Omega.

As it says in Hebrews 13:8, '*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.*' You may look around you and sometimes feel or think that the world is collapsing: how far have we drifted? How far have we fallen from how things should be? But there was always a plan for how things should be - Jesus 'was' before all things were created; to put it another way, for the physicists amongst you, Jesus was before space-time. Jesus made space-time and therefore transcends space and time. The world that he came to redeem and restore was the world that he made. Yes, the world is far from how it should be. Yes, humanity is far from how it should be at this present time. And yes, each of us is far from how we should be. But he, the one that planned and created the world, shows us what life was meant to be like, what a father-son or a daughter-son relationship with God was supposed to be. But this wasn't simply meant to be a practical demonstration. Jesus's life

and his teachings aren't simply a 'how-to' manual, a manual for good living - for if they were, we're sunk again, because we'll fail again.

Jesus came to make right the unrighteous; to make right God's kingdom; to put things right-ways up: as it says in verse 20, *'Through him, God was pleased to reconcile all things, making peace through the blood of the cross.'*

So we are in the middle of a story where we know the ending, and yes, in these times we see, as it says in Romans 8:22, *'That the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains and that we ourselves may groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.'* But restoration is promised: not by some wise words of a teacher that the human race met along the way, but by the one who created us and all that we see around us.

The exciting thing is that this isn't just some set of philosophical or doctrinal statements that are simply words up in the cloud intended to get our theology in order. This is about everything, everything that we see and hear. This is about us.

To leave you on a cliff-hanger, the very next two words after today's reading are. 'And you...' - I encourage you to read on beyond today's reading.

Jesus is our frame of reference, our beginning and end, our creator and our redeemer. The world may spin; change may be forced upon us at a dizzying pace; we may be suffering from motion sickness. But the remedy for that motion sickness is to focus upon the fixed point that cannot be altered, that remains the same. Jesus, our beginning and our end.

Reading Text

Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in 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 in 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.