

‘Christ in Us: The Hope of Glory’

Col. 1:24–29; Acts 16:25–34

Good morning, everyone. It is an honour to stand here with you today to celebrate this special occasion - your graduation. As I look around, I am reminded of my own graduation back in 2012 which took place not in this building, but at the Wooden Chapel. I still remember that day vividly. My entire family was there to witness my graduation although they didn’t quite understand why I made such a bold move—leaving my job back in Korea to come to APNTS to study theology. My life has been a bit of a mystery to my own family who were not yet Christians. First, to Bangladesh twenty-five years ago, to Manila sixteen years ago, and to Manchester. To them, it may have looked like I was walking into the unknown over and over again. But for me, it was something deeper-something clear and strong. It was ‘Christ in me’. It was His presence that gave me the courage to step into the new and unknown, even when I couldn’t explain it fully to those around me. Yes, it often felt like a mystery. But to me, it was—and is—crystal clear. It was Christ in me who leads and guides me in every step.

To be honest, I don’t know each of your stories—how you first came to APNTS, what your theological journey has been like throughout your time here, or what lies ahead after graduation. Each of our paths is different. And yet, in many ways, I believe our stories are also deeply connected—interwoven through our shared journey of faith.

As I was reflecting on this year’s theme of APNTS, kindly shared with me—‘Christ in Us: The Hope of Glory’—from Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, several questions came to my mind. What did Paul mean when he wrote to this young congregation about ‘Christ in you’? Who is this Christ in whom their lives—and ours—are hidden? Who is

this Christ who is ‘all in all’? Why does Paul keep saying that ‘Christ dwelling in them’ should reshape and redefine their lifestyles, relationships with others, both insiders and outsiders, and even their very existence?

Well, here is a more difficult question: Where/How could they find signs of hope—this hope of glory—in an ever-confusing world where the imprints of seemingly ungodly powers dominated? I wonder if some of the Colossian believers might have asked these questions perhaps to Paul or Epaphras, who had planted and nurtured them. Their world was dominated by the Roman powers. At every corner of the streets, the message was unmistakable: Rome was in charge. Status of the emperor, festivals in his honour, the very coins they used everyday—literally everything proclaimed Rome’s power and presence. At the same time, they lived in a culture influenced by Greek philosophy—worldviews that shaped their daily life and thinking. And on the other side, there were strict Jewish religious voices, urging them toward a different kind of certainty—one that promised stability through law and tradition, but which may have offered a false sense of spiritual security. This is not totally new to us either, I believe. Our world is not so different from the one in the first century.

How on earth could they find ‘Christ in them’ while living in that confusing world which pulled them in different directions? How could they find the hope of glory in the midst of so much tension?

To these difficult questions, Paul offers a surprisingly calm response: It is Christ—Christ alone—who draws every aspect of life together. Every part of who we are—our actions, our thoughts, and our relationships—is drawn under Christ’s authority and power, shaped by Christ’s mindset, and by Christ’s way of dealing with others. In Colossians, Paul writes we are to be transformed in our speech and thinking,

in our relationships within our families, among fellow believers, and even with those outside the faith. But, I still find myself asking—Paul, how exactly? I need a more vivid picture or a clear guide. While asking these questions, I was reminded of a story from the book of Acts.

Here, I'd like to draw your attention to the story in Acts 16. While the story is set in Philippi, not in Colossae, it gives us a powerful glimpse of what it looked like for Paul and Silas to truly live out 'Christ in them'—the hope of glory—in the midst of a hostile world. In Philippi for the first time in Acts, Paul and Silas faced severe persecutions from the Gentiles. They were dragged into the marketplace, being stripped of their clothing, humiliated, and beaten in public, being accused of promoting foreign customs, and thrown into prison with their feet fastened in chains. These all took place rather quickly without any formal charges or legal arrangements. And perhaps even more disturbing was how ordinary it all seemed to the crowd in Philippi. In fact, it was a common occurrence for foreigners, especially those with no status in the Empire, to face such unjust treatment.

In the eyes of the Philippian Gentiles, Paul and Silas were likely seen as foreign labourers from the Eastern part of the Empire—much like the migrant manual workers today. We know from Paul's own letters that he stayed different cities for short periods or in longer terms for a few years while working as a tent maker for his livelihood. He worked hard day and night to support himself while working for the Lord.

So, here in Philippi, a replica city of Rome, Paul and Silas were treated just like many other foreign manual labourers. After all, they were nobodies. This was how the Empire, and Philippi, the Roman Colony, worked. The Empire worked for the benefit of the powerful with status. If you didn't belong there, didn't have any links or ties to

prominent persons, you would most likely find yourself in a very vulnerable position of being unjustly treated.

This is what Paul writes in **Colossians 1:24, “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”** Paul most likely wrote Colossians while in prison. And in Acts 16, Paul and Silas were in the dark prison cell in Philippi with open wounds and their feet in chains. At midnight, in the darkest and most painful moment, they prayed and sang hymns to God. Paul and Silas were indeed rejoicing by the fact that they were embodying Christ in their sufferings at that moment. They were living Christ in their humiliation, unjust treatments, and sufferings. In the darkest inner cell with open wounds, they prayed, but also sang hymns to God, rejoicing that they were participating in Christ’s suffering for the sake of his body, which is the church.

But living Christ is not only about enduring the sufferings, but also about proclaiming and embodying the life of Christ in every situation. Surprisingly, at least to me, they sang hymns in prison. But what hymns? Perhaps one of the hymns from Psalms or maybe with my wild imagination I wondered whether they sang the Christ hymn from Philippians 2. The hymn of Christ, the story of Christ, which contrasts the power of the Empire with the humility of Jesus. It is the hymn which encapsulates the gospel, which Paul was so eager to proclaim in season or out of season.

The story of Christ is in stark contrast to the upward movement of the Empire where the Emperor, a human being claimed to be divine and took advantage of his power and exalted himself as god. In contrast, Jesus who was the image of the invisible God took a form of a slave and humbled himself and became obedient to the point of

death and God exalted him above all names. The supremacy of Christ which Paul writes in Colossians 1 is in line with the story of Christ in Philippians 2.

Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 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.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 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. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 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.

Let me also read the story of Christ in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:4-10

[In your relationships with one another, Let the same mind be in you that was in] Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with Go as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When Paul and Silas were singing hymns in the innermost cell at the darkest hour, the other prisoners were carefully listening to the hymn. If it was indeed somewhat similar to **the Christ hymn in Philippians 2**, they were in fact listening carefully to the story of Christ, or the message of the gospel, offering a different way of life, one in stark contrast to the story of the Empire. In a way Paul and Silas were revealing the mystery, the word of God, making 'Christ in them' known to the prisoners through the hymns they sang in prison. It was Christ whom they proclaimed while in afflictions.

Their prayer and singing did not go unnoticed by God. God responded with a violent earthquake. The earthquake shook the very foundations of the prison. Acts 16 says the earthquake was so violent that it not only shook the grounds, but it also opened all the doors and chains which bound the prisoners. Freedom for all the prisoners, not just for Paul and Silas, but also for those who listened to their hymn, the story of Christ! But Paul and Silas's way of living 'Christ in them' didn't stop here.

When the jailer saw the open doors, he assumed the prisoners had escaped. This was the worst to happen to him while he was on duty. We who know the story of Acts may guess what might have been the fate of this jailor. Remember when Peter escaped the prison with the help of the angel in Acts 12, the jailors who kept Peter got killed instead of Peter. So, thinking that the prisoners escaped already, the jailor was about to kill himself. He was overwhelmed by everything happening around him, witnessing the earthquake, the prison doors being opened, and even more strangely witnessing the prisoners who did not take advantage of this divine favour on them. Instead, the prisoners, Paul and Silas, were concerned about the jailor's wellbeing.

This is one of the ways of revealing 'Christ in them' or revealing the riches of the glory of this mystery to the jailor, the enemy, as Paul writes in Colossians 1:27, "To them

God chose to **make known how great among the Gentiles** are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.**” Or Paul was embodying Christ in him by putting the interest and welfare of the jailor first, not looking to his own interest, as Paul wrote in Philippians 2.

Instead of taking the divine favour for their own benefit, Paul and Silas **let it go**, in some sense. They didn’t walk out of the prison door for their freedom, granted by God. Instead, they remained in prison for the well-being of the jailor who in fact stood against their freedom. This was Paul’s way of living Christ in them. And to the jailor’s desperate question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas proclaimed the message of salvation, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved.’

In response, the jailor tended to the open wounds of Paul and Silas before he and his household got baptised. There was reconciliation in Christ, the acts of redressing the harm done to them, the acts of genuine care for one another, and table fellowship full of joy. Clear marks of what it means to ‘believe in the Lord Jesus’ are present here. It was the beginning of finding ‘life in Christ’ for these new Gentile believers, the jailor and his household.

The message of salvation totally transformed the relationship of the prisoners and the jailor. The prisoners, Paul and Silas, saved the life of the jailor, the one who stood against their freedom, by giving up their own freedom granted by God, and shared the message of eternal salvation for the eternal freedom of the jailor and his household.

So, I think this story in a unique way helps us understand what Paul means to embody ‘Christ in us’ while living in a world, dominated by the Empire way of life, Greek or secular ways of thinking, judgemental and legal ways of religious impulses. ‘Christ in

us' is not only about God's grace given to us, but it is also about the way of Christ - the very act of singing hymns to God in the most unlikely situations, the very act of living out the story of Christ; which is, caring and showing concerns for others, or even putting the welfare of the enemy before our own so that the enemies may become friends, and brothers and sisters, in Christ. Without Christ in Us – the Hope of Glory, this won't be possible. In Christ, the mystery is revealed and takes concrete forms.

Somewhat like you, who may step in to the next chapter of your life after the seminary, my husband and I are also stepping into something new. We recently resigned from the church we planted eight years ago in Manchester to follow another call to work for a new church plant in Warwick, a small town in Midland, UK. While my responsibility at NTC in Manchester continues, there is something new in our life as we step into the unknown with excitement and nervousness. We do not know what awaits us in this new task we are stepping into, but our prayer is this: 'Christ in us—the hope of glory' may be revealed in and through us as we seek to live out the story of Christ.

Perhaps some of you may also look forward to the things after APNTS whether that be further education, going back to full-time ministry, or even simply returning home. My prayer is this: let us live out 'the story of Christ' in our lives regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in. As we reveal 'Christ in us' by participating in the life of Christ, and by living 'Christ in us', Christ who is all in all, our hope of glory will keep our lives in him for the glory of the Father. May God bless you.