

**7/17/2016**  
**Christ Trek**  
**Colossians 1:15-28**

Everything seems to be coming undone--the center no longer holding. Every day we ask: "What's this world coming to?" The writer of Colossians addresses such doom and gloom head-on, insisting that there is a center--and that center is still holding.

This center isn't some thing. It is some one. The beloved son, Jesus Christ, is the glue, the cement, the coherence of the cosmos. For his sake alone God prevents the world from coming apart at the seams.

Fifty years ago, television viewers were able to travel where no one had gone before. In 1966, they watched the first episode of the science fiction series Star Trek.

Appearing for the first time were Captain Kirk, Spock, Scotty, Uhura, McCoy and Sulu -- characters who became cultural icons and took their fans on a series of space adventures. In the opening line of the show, Kirk says, "Captain's log, Stardate 1513.1. Our position, orbiting planet M-113. On board the Enterprise, Mr. Spock, temporarily in command. On the planet, the ruins of an ancient and long-dead civilization."

From the very start, Star Trek told the story of the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its mission: "To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before."

Now, a half-century after the launch of the original show, Paramount is releasing the third installment of its rebooted series of movies. Called Star Trek Beyond, it will appear in theaters starting this Friday, July 22. Captain Kirk and his crew will be back, although it appears that they have lost the starship Enterprise. They will once again be sent off on an adventure filled with space villains and lots of new alien creatures.

"We got no ship," says Captain Kirk. "No crew. How are we going to get out of this one?" It seems the Enterprise crew always finds hope in the impossible.

**Long before the debut of the first Star Trek, the apostle Paul took the Colossians on a Christ Trek.**

Paul wrote that Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created ... in him all things hold together" (vv. 15-17). He expanded their understanding of Jesus Christ and took them where no one had gone before.

Paul can do the same for us today, reminding us that Christ is not trapped in an ancient and long-dead civilization. So often, we think of Jesus as a first-century Galilean preacher, but Paul insists that he is the one through whom God "was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (v. 20). Christ holds together all of the strange new worlds of our universe, and leads us to a new kind of life that is beyond our normal experiences. When we allow ourselves to go on a Christ Trek, we discover that he is bigger and bolder than we can possibly imagine, always working as the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all things.

Christ helps us to find hope. Even in situations that might seem to be impossible.

## **Christ the Creator**

First, Christ is the Creator. Paul tells us that "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" (v. 16). Christ has been part of creation since the very beginning, helping to form not only our world but also the strange new worlds that exist at the farthest edges of the universe. When we boldly go where no one has gone before, we discover that Christ has already been there -- as Paul tells the Colossians, "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (v. 17).

Christ's role in creation is a comfort, because it assures us that there is no place in the universe that is outside of the loving embrace of the Creator Christ.

- In places that are distant from family and friends, Christ is there.
- In situations that feel hopeless and God-forsaken, Christ is there.
- In times of pain and suffering, Christ is there.
- In valleys of deep darkness, Christ is there.

The gospel of John tells us that all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. The light of Christ "shines in the darkness," says John, and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:3-5).

From the very first Star Trek episode, the universe is portrayed as a fundamentally good creation. Alien enemies might fight with Captain Kirk and his crew, but they are ultimately forgiven and find a way to cooperate. On the starship Enterprise, people of different races, genders, backgrounds and abilities discover ways to work well together. All of this fits with Paul's understanding of creation, with Christ as one who holds everything together.

### **Christ the Redeemer**

Next, Christ is the Redeemer. Paul knew that the Colossians had been "estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" (v. 21). Like us, they had allowed their sinfulness to separate them from God and from each other, and they wandered aimlessly in evil. They needed to be reconciled, which means to be put back into right relationship. They needed to be redeemed, which means to be delivered from sin.

Fortunately, God worked through Jesus "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (v. 20). When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the price for all of the sins of the world, and showed us through this sacrifice just how much God loves us. As Paul tells the Colossians, God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (vv. 13-14). To receive this gift of forgiveness, we simply need to believe in Jesus and remain steadfast in the faith (v. 23).

An example of this steadfastness is found by journalist Angelo Stagnaro in a Star Trek episode called "Bread and Circuses." Captain Kirk and his crew come across a planet which contains a modern version of the Roman Empire, complete with gladiators, senators and corrupt politicians. A group of renegade slaves practices a peace-loving religion of "total love and brotherhood," and the ruthless empire is determined to wipe them out.

The Colossians who received Paul's letter would have found this episode to be very familiar. After all, they were Christians living in a city of Asia Minor, which was part of the first-century Roman empire.

The twist in the Star Trek episode is that the slaves imprisoned for their religion are sun worshipers. Mr. Spock points out that "it seems illogical for a sun worshiper to develop a philosophy of total brotherhood. Sun worship is usually a primitive, superstitious religion."

But then Lieutenant Uhura pipes up from her communications console: "I'm afraid you have it all wrong," she says. "I've been monitoring some of their old-style radio waves. ... It's not the sun up in the sky. It's the Son of God."

Christ is our Redeemer -- the one who offers us redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He gives us the power to love our enemies and work for peace, even in very difficult situations. This was true in the Roman Empire, it was true in Star Trek and it is true for us today.

### **Christ the Sustainer**

Finally, Christ is the Sustainer. Paul worked hard to help the Colossians so that he would be able to "present everyone mature in Christ." He toiled and struggled with all the energy that Christ powerfully inspired within him (vv. 28-29). In all of his challenges, he knew that he was not alone, but that Christ was supporting him and sustaining him.

We can be equally confident that Christ is with us, working for good in our lives. He is the "head of the body, the church" (v. 18), and, as members of the church, we can benefit from our connection to him. Later in Colossians, Paul advises us to hold fast to Christ the head, "from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God" (2:19).

God wants us to grow in faith and wisdom every day, with help from the Christ who sustains us as head of the church. The true nature of God is explored in the movie Star Trek V: The Final Frontier, in which a Vulcan character becomes convinced that God exists on an undiscovered planet at the center of the Milky Way galaxy. This divine being is said to yearn for our love and attention, which sounds good -- to a point.

The problem with this creature is that it demands that the starship Enterprise be brought closer to the planet. When Captain Kirk wonders why God would need a starship, the creature attacks him in retribution. The crew realizes that the authentic God would never inflict harm on people for pleasure.

While the true God wants to sustain us, false gods always want to deplete us. Think of the many idols that lure us, but then hurt us: sex, money, power, prestige. We give them our love and attention, and they leave us feeling empty and alone.

Better to venture out on a Christ Trek, with the goal of growing closer to the one who is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (v. 15). He will never let us down, but will continue to be our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Wherever we go, and whatever we face, he will live in us and offer us the help, forgiveness and support we need.

In Star Trek, characters always hope to live long and prosper.

**Christ Trek: live faithfully and well.**

But on a Christ Trek, the promise is that you will live faithfully and well.

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In this ancient hymn to Christ Paul responds to those who think that what Christ has done is not enough for salvation.

**Colossians 1:15-28**

**Common English Bible**

The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the one who is first over all creation,  
Because all things were created by him:  
both in the heavens and on the earth,  
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.  
Whether they are thrones or powers,  
or rulers or authorities,  
all things were created through him and for him.  
He existed before all things,

and all things are held together in him.  
He is the head of the body, the church,  
who is the beginning,  
the one who is firstborn from among the dead  
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.  
Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,  
and he reconciled all things to himself through him—  
whether things on earth or in the heavens.

He brought peace through the blood of his cross.  
Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your  
minds, which was shown by your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you  
by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people  
who are holy, faultless, and without blame. But you need to remain well  
established and rooted in faith and not shift away from the hope given in the  
good news that you heard. This message has been preached throughout all  
creation under heaven. And I, Paul, became a servant of this good news.

Now I'm happy to be suffering for you. I'm completing what is missing from  
Christ's sufferings with my own body. I'm doing this for the sake of his body,  
which is the church. I became a servant of the church by God's commission,  
which was given to me for you, in order to complete God's word. I'm  
completing it with a secret plan that has been hidden for ages and  
generations but which has now been revealed to his holy people.

God wanted to make the glorious riches of this secret plan known among the  
Gentiles, which is Christ living in you, the hope of glory. This is what we preach  
as we warn and teach every person with all wisdom so that we might present  
each one mature in Christ.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of this  
holy word.