

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-23

Sermon: The Brokenness of Sin by Pastor Jenn

Today we wrap up our sermon series based on the stain glass windows in our sanctuary. Each window displaying broken pieces of glass that offer beautiful images inspiring discipleship. And so I thought it would be nice to share with you the history behind stained glass windows.

Lycurgus Cup



Stained glass has been used for thousands of years, beginning with the Ancient Romans and Egyptians, who produced small objects made from colored glass. While few fully intact stained glass pieces from this period exist, the Lycurgus Cup indicates that this practice emerged as early as the 4th century.

Stained glass became popular during the Middle Ages, and by the 12th century, the practice had become sophisticated. Chartres in France became the leading stained-glass manufacturer, and the materials they produced were of extremely high quality. In fact, the Chartres Cathedral contains one of the oldest examples of a rose stained-glass window.

Chartres Cathedral



Henry VII of England



Stained glass continued to be very popular throughout Europe during the Renaissance period. Henry VII of England brought stain glass workers in to create the windows in Kings College, Cambridge. Including one depicting himself.

However, during the Reformation, many stained-glass windows were smashed and replaced with plain glass. This destruction meant that many traditional stained-glass methods were forgotten, and were not rediscovered until the 19th century.

And so the 19th century saw a renewed interest in medieval churches, and more churches were built to include elaborate stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible and other religious images. This tradition continued in many churches throughout the world, including ours, here at First Hershey.

While the history of stained glass may have begun for simple enhancement of home items, like a cup, it developed into a massive form of art and storytelling. It is said that during the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries, while Europe saw the construction of many large church buildings, the church leaders at the time were dealing with a mostly illiterate population. Since most of the people could not read and write, stained glass windows were put into the new church buildings to help tell Bible stories. Basically, stained glass windows developed as a theological art form—a way to convey to the masses what the churches wanted them to think about, understand, as well as be inspired by.

With this sermon series, I hope you have heard some words of encouragement despite speaking about the brokenness of vulnerability, abandonment, comfort, relationships, assumptions, and darkness. Because in the end, each window is a beautiful piece of art that conveys our Savior's life and teachings.

The last window we look at is the window we see upfront. The one that depicts Christ's birth, his visit to the synagogue at the age of 12, his resurrection, and ascension. The window represents as our text states, that in Jesus, God dwelled with us and was reconciled with us. In Jesus, God takes away the brokenness of the world. That is our sin.

Here's the background to that scripture lesson from Colossians. You and I have looked at Colossians prior, and you may recall that it was the church that worshipped the stars, something Paul was aware and to be honest appalled. In order to correct them, Paul writes them this letter, while he is sitting in prison, because the Church should not be centered on the stars, it should be centered on Jesus. Paul writes, **15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16for 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.

Paul is clearly saying it's not creation we should be worshiping, but rather it's creator, as all things were created to enhance Christ's glory. **17He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18He is the head of the body, the church... 19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and 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.**

Paul wants to make it clear to the Colossians that Christ is not just one more among many competing approaches to life, Christ is to be of primary importance in the lives of his followers, in other words, just as these stain glass windows are centered in our sanctuary, Jesus is to be the center of our lives, shaping and forming us with the heart of his earthly ministry. A ministry that teaches us: His love for the simple and left behind as his birth story reveals. His seeking of wisdom and longing to be with God in the temple. His patience and second chances he offered in the resurrection. And his hope and revelation for everlasting life through the ascension. And so to look at the text and to look at those windows is to see God's beauty of grace and reconciliation for us and with us. To see these images, we remember the story, and we claim this is who we are, we are Christians.

Rev. Dr. John Grant, senior pastor of the Mount Zion Baptist Church in downtown Asheville, North Carolina shares the experience he had hosting a community-wide Good Friday worship service. He wrote that in attendance were African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Democrats, Republicans, Baptists, United Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. Dr. Grant said at the beginning of the service, he stepped up to the pulpit, looked out at the crowd, and said: **"We are diverse. Our skin colors vary, as do our denominations, our politics, our genders, and our ages. Many of us do not always understand each other. But in this place something miraculous happens. In this place, though diverse, we become family because here we can all get together around Jesus."** And then he quoted this Colossians text, *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*¹

Friends, that's the beauty of this window, God made flesh in Jesus, the One before all things, holds all things together to be our center, our guide, our way. And today and every day that we see that window, we are invited to join the story of the Christians of the church of Colossians, of the Christians of the church in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and 19th century. We are invited to join with the Christians gathered at a Good Friday community service in Asheville, North Carolina, and those who raised the money to place these windows in this church. And as we join with those Christians of ages past, and those to come, we celebrate our faith, as we all get together around Jesus, the one who breaks the bounds of sin, with his beautiful, inspiring way of life.

Let us pray: Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, whose chosen dwelling place is with the broken, we acknowledge and confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; we have not loved you with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. Yet Lord, you are full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and rich in mercy; there is always forgiveness with you! Restore to us the joy of your salvation; bind up that which is broken, strength to our wills, and rest to our souls. Speak to each of us of your love, and let your word abide with us, as offer ourselves to you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

¹ <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4011/sermon-options-july-21-2019>