

Super glue: Colossians 1:11-20

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [November 16, 2004](#) issue

When I needed a childhood photograph for an upcoming staff retreat, I climbed up to the attic to forage among the boxes. There I found my earliest photo album, and in it a picture from my second year of life. Applesauce must have been on the menu that day. Whether it was the applesauce itself or the person feeding it to me one spoonful at a time, something led me to doze off. I fell asleep in the high chair and suddenly, “Click.” Instant photo-op. As a youngster, I used to think that was the funniest picture in the book. As I held the hefty album, I noticed that the brittle binding clung to life by threads. Not only had the pages from 1958 torn away at their serrated fold, but the rubber cement underneath each photo had died. Rubber cement, one of the great wonders of the world, apparently has a life expectancy of under 46 years.

All of the precious photos from my first three years were jumbled together. I imagined a historian trying to assemble these pieces of my life, and wondering what the rhyme and reason was to this collage of cluttered prints. Mother had painstakingly glued each one in careful order, but now the glue had failed, and my life seemed something of a mess. One season blurred into another, with pictures taken on the beach mixed with those of pajama-clad kids in our living room.

Fortunately, the bond that we know through the Christian faith has a longer life. Whoever composed the hymn in the first chapter of Colossians knew that key—that Jesus Christ is the coherence of creation. He is not only “before all things,” but “in him all things hold together.” He is the glue that never dies, the bond that never fails, the togetherness of the complex world we inhabit. Christ is the key to both cosmic significance and human existence. Were God’s power to dry up in the life of this Christ, the world would revert to chaos—a jumbled and incoherent mess.

If a jumbled picture album is frustrating, an incoherent life is deadly. One of the reasons people of faith strive to make Christ “first place in everything” is because we do not warm up well to incoherent living. Dissolution saddens. When a marriage dissolves, the division hurts and no one really wins. When a congregation divides, a certain zeal for love can disappear forever. Disintegration tends to destroy.

In our individual experience, it seems that when a few things fall apart, the whole apparatus of life threatens to collapse. That's what I see happening whenever people lose their center and forget the comforting quality of the Lord's presence. It is amazing what a few days of poor test results or unresponsive medication will do. One's whole world can seem to disintegrate. All coping mechanisms seem to go into hiding.

If I have one prayer for those who are entering critical surgery, it is this: That the peace of Christ will somehow hold the life of this patient and his or her loved ones together. Not physically together, as if no one in the family can afford to die, but spiritually together, as in that incomprehensible peace of Christ that can find its settling way into human hearts.

When chaos strikes, faith-filled people look for ways to quit idolizing their fears. They seek strategies for pulling life back together. The challenge for most of us is to make the priority of Christ more than mere words. Who needs more *talk* of making Christ first in our lives? The world is full of religious talk. We need instead to act, to *live* as if Christ were indeed the head of the body, and not some extra equipment we strap on when it's "third and long."

In Bibles that provide chapter headings, this section of Colossians may be titled "The Supremacy of Christ," or something similar. This is the Christ in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Nothing of God is held back or left out of the person of Jesus. Though God once was content to dwell in *places* like Sinai, Zion or the Temple, now God is in a *person*. Everything that God is, and cares about, now resides in Jesus Christ. Christ is the face or the image of the invisible God.

Western culture has so thoroughly domesticated Christ that it takes some imagination to see the cosmic Christ of Colossians. We have whittled him down to the size of a pocket charm, confining him to the containers of our own ethnic, economic and political instincts. Chumminess is in; grandeur is out. We want a version of God that bears some resemblance to ourselves.

Fosteria, Ohio, made news in 1986 when a local resident saw an image of Christ on the rusting side of a soybean oil storage tank. Archer Daniels Midland was suddenly on the religion page. Hundreds of cars lined Route 12 on August evenings, full of curiosity seekers waiting to sneak a peek. As one local named Jimmy noted, "It's real. The image looks like me, but I've always had long hair and a beard." With more

profundity than he may have ever realized, Jimmy spoke for all of us who unwittingly like to see Christ reflecting the image of our own lives.

The way to reorder jumbled lives and hold meaning together in the face of chaos, however, is not to see the fullness of ourselves in Christ. It is to cherish the fullness of God dwelling in Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, the one who holds all things together, the glue that makes Christ the King Sunday so important.