



Colossians 1.15-28

Did anyone notice it was football's WORLD CUP FINAL last weekend? Some of us may have been celebrating, others drowning their sorrows, some people in this region unsure whether to cheer or not (in spite of fact that more than half the players in the winning team came from a local club), others wondering what all the fuss was about! It was certainly a great sporting victory for Spain.

As always the match generated a lot of comment - much of it concerning the very rough, almost violent approach of the Dutch team. One headline writer called it a "Total Disgrace", referring to the Dutch tradition of playing in an attractive style called "Total Football". Ironically it was Dutch coaches, Cruyff, Van Gaal and Rijkaard who introduced and this style at FC Barcelona - so the Spanish victory was really "made in Holland"!

We're not here to talk about football, but there is a lot about football in the Bible. Here are a few examples:-

Psalm 121.5 "The LORD is your Keeper."

1 Samuel 16.17 "Bring me a man who can play skilfully."

Proverbs 4.27 "Do not swerve to the right or to the left; keep your foot away from evil."

Philippians 3.13-14 "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal..."

SOME GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE WORLD CUP

1. It brings people together - within divided countries to support their team AND brings different races and nations together on the field and in the crowd to enjoy sport together.
2. At its best, the "beautiful game" is a demonstration of breathtaking skill, courage and honest endeavour.
3. The World Cup gives hope and inspiration to millions of people around the world (a) because ANY country can win the trophy (in theory at least). (b) because any boy



from the poorest ghetto of the poorest nation can dream of becoming an international hero with incredible wealth.

4. Football has filled the gap vacated by religion. Modern stadiums are architectural masterpieces - the cathedrals of our day - where people gather in huge numbers to sing, hope, dream, worship!

SOME NOT SO GOOD THINGS ABOUT WORLD CUP

1. Encourages xenophobia and disorder - an opportunity for racist violence and alcohol abuse - an excuse for all that is worst in human society.

2. Matches are a showcase for bad sportsmanship, cheating and deception of referees. Rich players can set an appalling example to our children all too often.

3. The World Cup hopes and dreams of most individuals and nations are doomed to failure. Even for the winners, the World Cup is unlikely to deliver any real or lasting benefits. England won in 1966 and look at us now...

ST PAUL enjoyed some success in his day, yet he considered all his worldly possessions and successes RUBBISH and longed for something BETTER, something REAL and PERMANENT...

So, what SHOULD people put their faith in today? Is the cross of Jesus Christ any more reliable than the crosses of Lampard or Xavi?

Our Bible reading from Colossians is, amongst other things, about IMAGE, about VICTORY and about PARTICIPATION.

Image

The first part of our reading is a wonderful poem about Jesus and was probably used as a hymn or creed in the very earliest days of the Church. It begins with the bold claim that Jesus is the IMAGE of the invisible God. But what does this mean?

If I tell you that my mate Geoff is the image of Brad Pitt, what do you understand by this? Probably that I think he looks quite like the film star - nothing more than this. But when Paul describes Jesus as being the image of God he's saying a lot more. So do other Bible writers:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.
(Hebrews 1.3)



For Paul and the other NT writers, Jesus is not just a "lookalike", his identification with God is total. He is God made flesh, He is God in human form.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Col 1.19).

Victory

Paul spells out what this means:

- Jesus didn't just come into existence when Mary became pregnant, he existed before time began and was fully involved in the creation of all things (v15-16). He continues to create and sustain all life (v17).
- Jesus was fully involved in God's victory over sin and death and his work of repairing the broken relationship of all his creatures with him, his work of bringing peace and reconciliation to all creation (v20).

Notice the repetition of the words *all things* which come up five times in these few verses. Paul is describing a TOTAL identification of Jesus with God, a TOTAL victory and a TOTAL reconciliation of all people and all things with God.

Paul describes a big vision and a big victory for Jesus, this man who is the image of God in the deepest and most intimate sense. But even as we sit like spectators at the world cup, celebrating the victory of Jesus and cheering, even worshipping our hero, we know that more is required of us.

Participation

Jesus is the image of God in a way that no one else can be, and yet that word image reminds us of something we've read before. In the very first chapter of the Bible we read this:

Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image... So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen 1.26,27)

God's intention was clearly that not just one but all human beings would be his image. But we know from history, from the Bible and from our own experience that human beings are a selfish and rebellious lot and so surely this idea of all people being in the image of God is doomed to fail... but this is where the Church comes in.



St George's Church
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As well as being the image of God , Paul describes Jesus as being *the head of the body, the church ... and the firstborn from among the dead* (v18).

He goes on to describe how the Church is full of the life and power and potential of Jesus and how its purpose is to share this gift with everyone (v27).

Are we taking this seriously enough here at St George's, here in Barcelona? Paul was prepared to suffer great hardship in the cause of the gospel (v27-28), but are we prepared to suffer even minor inconvenience?

Are we content to have a good image? Or will we strive with Paul to BE the image of God, the life-giving Body of Christ for the benefit of all people? As we saw in the pictures, what matters is not what we look like but how we show God to the world in the way we live.

If we join with Paul as wholehearted players in Jesus's team, we can be sure of winning a greater prize than any world cup.