

ALL OVER THE MAP

SHERARD EDINGTON

Colossians 1:11-20

This week, my daughter returned from Europe where she had been studying for the past three months. During this time, she lived in or visited a number of different cities across the continent. And I would follow her around. For example, the weekend that she spent in Prague, I went to Prague as well. She went in person; I went using the internet. With my computer I explored the locations that I knew she would be visiting. First, I would pull up a map for the traditional two-dimensional overview of the city. Then I would switch to satellite photos and study these. When I had a feel for the lay of the land, I would shift to Street View and use those panoramic photos taken at ground level to explore different neighborhoods by virtually strolling up and down the streets where my daughter might be visiting. If I stumbled upon something interesting like a monument or a cathedral, I would click on it to access relevant information. If I spotted a tempting café, I would click there to read the menu and reviews. Using my computer was the next best thing to being there. I could see what my daughter was seeing without leaving the comfort of home. With the internet, those normally flat and static maps pulsed with a slew of engaging information.

You may be surprised but map technology like this has been around for hundreds of years. We have not had GPS or the internet for very long, but maps that provide us with multiple layers of knowledge have existed for centuries. An example of what I am talking about is the Ebstorf map.

The Ebstorf map was discovered around 1830. It was found in a convent in Ebstorf, Germany. It appears, however, to have been created centuries earlier in the 1200s. The map is enormous. It is 12 feet by 12 feet square and was constructed from thirty single pieces of sheepskin parchment sewn together. The map itself was painted onto this large parchment canvas.

A few years after the map was discovered, it was relocated to the city of Hanover and added to the map collection in the archives there. Over the decades, attempts were made to preserve the map.

So, what makes this map so special? First of all, is its size. It is the largest known medieval map. Second, is the subject of the map. This is nothing less than a map of the world.

What does the Ebstorf map look like? The canvas is square but the map portion is a perfect circle tightly filled with a multitude of images, representations, and text. But this certainly isn't the sort of map that you would use to navigate anywhere. It doesn't have streets and roads. It is not drawn to scale. It does indicate

bodies of water and land masses. It also has depictions of cities and people and animals and historical events. The corners of the canvas outside the circle are covered with textual information. In all, this map contains 845 images with 1500 pieces of textual information.

What is most significant about this map is the presence of the body of Jesus. At the very top of the map—at 12 o'clock on the circle—we can see Jesus' head. At the bottom, at 6 o'clock, we see his feet. At 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock are his outstretched hands which show the holes from the nails of his crucifixion. In the center of the circle, we see Jerusalem. This is a Christian map of the world.

On the Ebstorf map we find localities—Asia, Europe, and Africa. There are bodies of water such as the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Red Sea. There are cities such as Antioch, Ephesus, and Lo Yang (once the capital of China). There are peoples such as the Chinese as well as mythical people such as the Amazons. The map also contains history. It depicts the stages of Alexander's expedition against the Persian Empire in the third century BC. We can view moments from Greek and Roman history. In addition to the image of Jesus, there are numerous religious motifs. In the center, at Jerusalem, we can see a depiction of the resurrection. Also, on the map we find the biblical Paradise with Adam and Eve. There is Noah's Ark, the tower of Babel, Bethlehem, Cana, Nazareth, and places related to the travels of the Apostle Paul, and much more.

The purpose for the creation of the Ebstorf map has been lost. This map is many things. It is a map of the world. It is an encyclopedia of history. It is an illustrated Bible. It is a collection of myths and legends. It is the 12th century's version of the internet—a graphical representation of a database of complex information.

What stands out to us about this map is that despite all that is depicted on the map, we clearly can see that the world is held together by Jesus. Jesus is the foundation. He is the cornerstone. He is the substrate on which everything rests.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, describes a cosmos that is also held together by Christ.

As Christians, we frequently fall into the habit of reducing Jesus to being a Galilean peasant who happened to grow up to be a religious leader. He was a talented preacher and organizer. He motivated people to follow him. He offered a compelling vision of how the world might be if people just loved one another.

But Paul begins this letter to the Colossians with the forceful reminder that Jesus is more than that, that Jesus is *the image of the invisible God*. Jesus is the one in *whom all things in heaven and on earth were created*, things we can see and things we can't.

In the Ebstorf map we find a reflection of Paul's words about Jesus. In the Ebstorf map Jesus holds all things together. We see this in his outstretched arms literally holding the edges of the world.

Both Paul's words and the Ebstorf map remind us of Jesus' role in God's creation. Jesus is savior. Jesus is King. Jesus is the icon of the God we cannot see. As Paul writes, in Jesus *all things hold together... in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*. Jesus was human and Jesus was God. God resides in him.

The creator of the Ebstorf map places Jesus as the framework of the world—all time, history, and faith are built on him. In a similar way, Paul identifies Jesus as *the firstborn of all creation*.

The question I have for you today is this: Where do we place Jesus? Is Jesus just someone with some nice things to say who lived 2000 years ago and now has little relevance for our lives today? Or, do we truly view Jesus as the Christ, living among us, full of God's power and glory, the image of God, our connection to the divine?

This question is relevant to how we conduct our lives of faith. If we follow Jesus the philosopher then all we need do is study his teachings. But if we recognize Jesus as divine, the one through whom and for whom all things were created then we must give our whole selves in worship. Our lives must be defined by him. He is our king and we are his subjects.

Today is the final Sunday of the Christian calendar. We call it Christ the King Sunday. As the year concludes, it is the day to ask ourselves do we recognize Jesus as king? Do we give ourselves to him?

Finally, back to the Ebstorf map. Where can you go today and see it? Sadly, you can't. The map was destroyed in the allied bombing on Hanover in October 1943. What we have left are only facsimiles of the original. A magnificent work of art was lost in the ravages of war.

Our reading from Colossians concludes with the word *cross*. The cross is a reminder of how Jesus was lost to us—by his horrendous death by crucifixion. But Paul assures us that Jesus' existence did not end with the cross. God raised him and gave him new life—the same new life God offers to us through redemption and forgiveness of our sins. Paul writes, *Through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross*.

The Ebstorf map may not exist anymore but we do have photographic facsimiles. After the original was lost in 1943, an artist used those facsimiles to recreate the map so that it lives today. In the same way, when we give ourselves to Christ our king we become facsimiles of him. May we be the reproductions of Jesus that people can point to and say, "I see the Christ."