### “Thrones or Dominions” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 20, 2025

**Colossians 1:15–19**

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 16 for 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. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

**Luke 10: 38–42**

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me.” 41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, 42 but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

These two passages may seem unconnected, but I think there is a connection through the person of Jesus. One reason that sitting at Jesus’ feet is “the better part” (Luke 10:42) is that he has cosmic power and divine origin; he existed before all things, and all things were created through him (Col 1:16–17). In him the fullness of God is pleased to dwell (1:19). How could there be anything better than sitting at his feet and learning from him? Imagine doing your Bible study at the feet of Jesus.

Let’s spend a little time on the Colossians passage, written by Paul or by a close associate of Paul’s, and then attributed to him after his death. At the very least, the first chapter of Colossians is very close to Paul’s own thought. It clearly states that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and that all things in heaven and earth were created through him and for him. This includes the heavenly powers, angelic powers, called thrones (*thronoi*), dominions (*kyriotêtes*), rulers (*archai*), and powers (*exousiai*), perhaps referring to four specific rankings of angelic authorities.

In chapter 2, we are told that Jesus is the “head of every ruler and authority” (2:10). In Ephesians, it says that God set Christ “at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality (*archê*), and power (*exousia*), and might (*dynamis*), and dominion (*epouranios*)” (Eph 1:20–21). So it is clear that these are heavenly powers, and that he is their superior as well as their creator father.

Going back to Colossians 2, we can read “He disarmed the rulers and authorities [the *archai* and the *exousiai*] and made a public example of them, triumphing over them” (2:15). Combining these passages with some verses in Galatians and Revelation, it seems that some of these heavenly rulers and powers rebelled against Jesus, and that is why Jesus had to triumph over them. In some places it implies that he brings them back under control; in other places it implies that they are destroyed. Maybe some were able to become loyal again, while others were not.

We don’t need to settle all these matters. They are above our pay grade. The main points for us are that Jesus is the creator of this very world, and is superior to heavenly angelic forces, some of whom went astray and had to be—and *were—*taken back under control. *This* is the divine being who bestowed himself upon the human sphere. His whole life is a revelation, and we have a special word for it: the Incarnation. A mere two thousand years ago, divinity visited humanity, and, unfortunately, the authority figures in Jerusalem did not know the “time of your visitation from God” (Luke 19:44). Human stubbornness and fear of loss of control caused some people to shut their minds and hearts. This often happens. Unfortunately, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin” (Mark 6:4). First Isaiah, and then Paul, had this experience, and cried out “who has believed our report?” (Isa 53:1; Rom 10:16).

Well, Mary of Bethany believed it, and so did her sister. Martha gets the short end of the stick in some discussions, but it was Martha who first expressed faith in Jesus as lord of the resurrection. He said to her “I am the resurrection and the life. . . Do you believe this?” and she said “yes, Lord, I believe” (John 11:25–27). This was right before Jesus raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead.

Martha and Mary both had good reasons to listen to Jesus’ teachings. And despite his power to raise people from the dead, and his ability to exert his authority over principalities and powers and dominions, he preferred to spend time with his friends and tell them about the Father’s love. We see him at weddings, we see him visiting friends, and we see him taking time off and going into the hills to pray. Not everything was hyper-serious and public.

He loved this family of siblings: Mary, who heeded his every word; Martha, who believed his claims, but often busied herself in the kitchen; and Lazarus, evidently a close friend.

Friendship is one of the three best models for the love of God. The others are parental love and married love. God loves us as a friend, as a parent, and as an intimate partner. Each of these three kinds of human love have lessons to give us about God’s love. C. S. Lewis, who wrote *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, has a different list in his book *The Four Loves*; he looks at the love for familiar things, friendship, eros, and charity. It might be that he leaves parental love out since it has less reciprocity in it. At least in the early years, it is mostly the love of a parent for a child.

Contrasting types numbers two and three, Lewis says lovers are always talking about their love and are face to face, absorbed in each other, while friends seldom talk about their friendship, but are side-by-side, absorbed in some shared interest (*Four Loves* [Harcourt, 1988], 61). Friendship is always *about* something of common interest. He says “true Friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend” (61).

Lewis had a remarkable circle of friends known as the Inklings, most of whom were Oxford professors who shared an interest in literature, including imaginative literature. Lewis’s friends in the Inklings included the important but partially forgotten writers Charles Williams and Owen Barfield, lesser known writers Hugo Dyson and David Cecil, and the famous J. R. R. Tolkein. In fact, it was a series of conversations with Barfield that moved Lewis from atheism to a vague belief in God, and conversations with Tolkein that moved him from that to being decisively Christian. These friends would listen to and critique each other’s writings-in-progress. Their work benefitted from their friendships.

In *The Four Loves,* Lewis says that, when friendship is practiced without jealousy and without any need to be needed, it “is eminently spiritual” (77), by which he means it has spiritual implications, but that can mean either good or bad spirituality. He goes on to say. “We all know the perilous charm of a shared hatred” (79). And so, even good friends have to beware of the dangers that can beset friendship, such as the danger of contempt and cruelty toward those outside the circle. For Christians, it should be easy to reign in any potential arrogance or cruelty, if we always remember who the Host is (90). In our earlier story, Martha thought she was hosting Jesus. She would have been more at peace if she had remembered that Jesus is really the Host.

It might be better to think of God as the Host of our friendships rather than as our own personal friend, since we sometimes think we can scold or criticize a friend. But even the Host of our friendships can be a kind of friend, too. As long as we keep our humility and common sense, we can think of God as a superior friend. And Jesus told the apostles they were his friends (John 15:15). What a friend we have in Jesus!

Go on and trust in the friendship of Jesus, but also in his lordship, his heavenly authority, even if the details are a little more than we can understand. The Godhead dwells in him, and he calls us friends! Amazing!