

Faith, Hope, and Love

Colossians 1:1-14 (ESV)

The Word of God for our meditation this morning comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians, especially these verses, **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven."**

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul starts off his letter to the Christians at Colossae with these words, **"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father"** (Col 1:1-2). Just as St. Paul greeted the Christians within the churches of Colossae, so I also greet you this morning. Paul greets them not only to be cordial but also because he did not have any intimate knowledge of these Christians. There were other laborers and pastors who taught the Word among the Christians at Colossae while Paul traveled around the world spreading the Gospel. Although Paul had the authority to teach the Word of God among the Christians of Colossae as an apostle of Jesus, he needed to greet them as one from a distance. I greet you because I do not know you yet. I come to serve in a similar manner to those faithful laborers. Yet I come as a vicar bearing the same message as Paul: **Grace to you and peace from God our Father**. Grace: God's unbounded love to you. Peace: knowing God is forever on your side. As Paul makes his greeting, he lays out the foundation of the Christian life, rooted in the one true God. As the beginning of my service, I think it very appropriate to model Paul in his introduction to the Colossians and give you the reason why you sit in those pews, and I stand here in the pulpit. The reason is:

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS OF FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE.

The Christian life is very simple: faith, hope, and love. That is what Paul thanks God for when he think of the Colossians: **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven."** Faith is who you are *in* Christ Jesus. Hope is confidence in the fulfillment of God's promises. Love is that Spirit-filled life towards God and towards your neighbor.

Who are you in Christ Jesus? You are Christians placed within the Trinity who experience this God in a special way. This is how Paul describes it, **“He [the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”** (Col 1:13-14). Beforehand, you were in darkness, in the reign and rule of the devil. This was not through a coincidence, but through your willful rebellion against God. Just as Adam and Eve wanted to be little gods, acting as the Creator instead of as creatures, so you were. You did not have redemption, but a debt – a debt owed to God for everything bad done. Now, being in the kingdom of his Son, you are released! You owe nothing to God. Jesus gives you through the forgiveness of sins not only a release from the debt but also an uncountable balance. And I remind you of this great change from darkness to light, from debt to redemption, for two reasons. One, to remind you of the magnificent work that Jesus alone could accomplish. Two, to warn you because the desire to be your own god still lives within you until you die and are with Jesus.

But now you are in the reign of the Son. And not only do you stand somewhere near the Son, Jesus Christ, but you stand *in* him. This means God the Father sees you as if he were looking at his Son Jesus. He sees his beloved. So you stand forgiven, in Jesus (and he in you) with a Father in heaven who wants nothing but the best for you. That is what it means to be the beloved. You come into this special relationship between the Father and the Son through **spiritual wisdom and understanding**. As Paul says, **“we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”** That is *Spiritual* with a capital S. That is the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. The Spirit of God is given you that you may know who Jesus is and start to live like it. The Spirit is thus a seal, a guarantee, that you are God’s own, and you have sure promises of a future glory.

The Christian life is not just about what happened previously or what you experience now, but also what you expect. This expectation is *hope*. God says now, “I love you.” Yet, he also says, “You will live forever with me. I will destroy death. I will restore life as it was meant in paradise.” These future promises are for all who enjoy faith in Christ Jesus now. When you hear, “Jesus has brought you into his kingdom and rule,” you should think, “I not only belong to Jesus now but will also for eternity.” What does that eternity look like? Paul describes it in two ways: the hope laid up for you in heaven and the inheritance of the saints in light.

“It is laid up in heaven.” Within the word “heaven” lies the vision of a place of bliss. There glorious treasures await the faithful believers in Jesus: choirs of angels, luscious landscapes, the splendor of God’s throne, a never-ending feast! This is the future promised, the future you cling to. “The inheritance of the saints.” When you hear “inheritance,” you should think “secured, locked-up.” This hope is a legal-binding contract between God and you. He has chosen to freely give everything due to his Son Jesus Christ to those who believe. The will has been written. Upon your death, or Jesus coming back a second time, the inheritance goes into effect. So whether looking at right

now, or looking to the future, the Christian can be sure he participates and experiences everything God wishes to give him.

What is your task then while you wait for the life to come? It is to live in a manner worthy of the Lord. This is what Paul prays for the Colossians to have, **“to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father...”**. There is a lot there to occupy your time. There is doing good works to your neighbor. There is increasing in the knowledge of God. There is enduring suffering and trials by God’s might. There is giving thanks to your heavenly Father in all things. Your whole body is at work; your heart in believing in God and your mind in learning of him; your tongue to thank and praise him for his goodness; your hands to help those around you.

“Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord” is really the whole topic of our VBS this next week. We will be teaching the children God’s 10 commandments. In these 10 commandments is the whole framework for the Christian life. While these little ones start to understand what their love should look like towards others, you too can learn and relearn so that your walk in Christ is fully pleasing to the Lord. For you parents sending your kids off, ask them during lunch or dinner time what they are learning. Help the reinforce their study of the Word of God, and also remind yourselves. To those volunteering, you too can spend this brief time for the benefit of your souls. To all you members of St. John, during your own lunch or dinner time, time when you wake up or time before you head to bed, grab your Luther’s Small Catechism and meditate on 2 commandments each weekday – just as the children are learning. If you don’t know where your catechism is, Google, “10 commandments Luther” and click the first link from cph.org. Read aloud each day each commandment and its meaning. “1st commandment: You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God about all things.” Then meditate and think through how this applies in your life. 5-10 minutes a day is all it takes to sow abundantly in the Word of God.

One example of love that Paul shows in our text for today is his thankfulness. He cannot stop thanking God for these Christians in Colossae. His first words were, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,”** (Col 1:3). With this thankfulness Paul shows his heart of faith. Paul shows that he loves his heavenly Father, whatever the Father should wish to give him. Paul shows how tremendous is the gift of fellow believers. He shows his true care for these Christians under his watch and care. I too have reasons thank God for you, my fellow Christians. My family has had such a warm and generous welcome to St. John’s. *Thank you.* Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your welcome. Thank you for your gifts.

And I say this from the pulpit to encourage you: encourage you in the good works that you’ve given me and you’ve given to your fellow members. I also would encourage

you to be always giving thanks to the Father. Shower him with praises for every good gift coming down from heaven: for your church here, for your family, for your abilities, for your health, for your wealth. All this thankfulness flows out from recognizing the love of your heavenly Father whom you know cares for you whatever you experience on this side of eternal life.

Faith, hope, and love: the Christian life in a few words. Each and every day remember who you are in Christ Jesus; you are one who was bought back from the reign of darkness into the reign of light. Remember where you are heading; you are confident that God will give you the inheritance of all the saints. Remember how your life will look: walking in a pleasing manner to the Lord.

Now may the peace which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.