

7th Sunday after Pentecost
July 10 and 11, 2010

Colossians 1:16-14 ðIntentional Christ-Livingö

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

New Christians and lifelong Christians have some things in common, but there are also some ways in which they differ. For example, both new and longtime Christians are certain that Christ Jesus is their Savior from sin, death and the devil. They are confident in the forgiveness of sins. They look forward to the resurrection of the dead. They share a common faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. If you have ever shared your Christian faith with others who did not know Christ before, including children who grow up in the faith, then you can be thrilled by the ðah haö moments when they understand and confess their own faith in Christ.

But sometimes new Christians and lifelong Christians can differ in the way they express their joy at the good news of Jesus Christ. New Christians can be very vocal with their joy and gratitude, with a strong desire to serve and tell others, whereas sometimes the longtime Christian may have joy, but not always express it so vocally. I had a friend Ruth who was a lifelong Christian, and at the age of about 24 expressed her envy of the new Christians' zealous and bold witness of Jesus Christ. I also remember a friend Grishden who came from Switzerland to serve as a nanny for a year, and after the Spirit and message of Christ touched her, she could not stop expressing her gratitude to God. She returned to her homeland and became a bold witness of Christ. Is it because we have become tired, lost our joy, or forgotten what it is that separates the saved from the not-yet-saved? We need such people as Grishden to remind us of the proper response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ ó gratitude, great joy and bold witness.

You have the same faith, hope, and love, and joy in Christ that Grishden has. Perhaps it was a pastor, a friend, or a parent who first led you to know Jesus. Maybe it was a teacher or a co-worker that took you to that next step with the Gospel ó to that ðah haö moment ó when you realized how much God loved you that he sent his Son to the cross. It is that message that brings you here today and every week. Your response to worship Christ has become ingrained in your behavior and intentional in your decision to be here. We gather to hear God's Word and proclaim praise and thanks for all that God has done for us in Christ.

This response is evident in Christians all over the world. Well, consider what's happening in Houston, Texas this week. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is meeting in convention this week to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ and to make plans for the future as the body of Christ. We are one of about 6000 Lutheran congregations that walk together in a common faith in Jesus Christ. And then next week thousands of Lutheran youth will gather in New Orleans to proclaim Jesus Christ in their worship and their service to the community. Both of these events are opportunities for Christians from around the world to gather together around the message of Christ which is renewing the church and making God's people joyful and bold witnesses of Christ.

We thank God for such opportunities to gather with other Christians and to hear the stories that God is doing among our Christian brothers and sisters around the world. We thank God for our own faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ at St. Paul's, and for our congregation ministries that tell our community and the church-at-large that we are in mission with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that we have a living faith in Christ. During my vacation this past week, I had the opportunity to tell about our St. Paul's Lutheran School ministry and that we are able to reach 400 children each week with the Gospel of Christ. On other occasions I have spoken about our Sunday School and other ministries, just as many of you have done, so that people around the world are hearing about our faithfulness to the Gospel, to God's Word, and to the church's ministries. The Gospel is bearing fruit at St. Paul's and all around the world, and so your love for Christ has become known to the world.

But how can we maintain a high level of Christian commitment and joy on a daily basis and for our entire lives? We cannot do it if we depend on our own effort, but we can be more intentional about how we live for Christ. Make it your priority to spend significant time with God's Word and Sacraments. Just as the physical body needs water and food for nourishment, so also the human soul needs spiritual food for spiritual nourishment. People cannot know what God's will is without God's Word, and we can forget when we are not constantly reminded. That is why there are many people around the world who have faced hell at the time of death because they did not know or understand that it is God's will that they come to him through faith in Jesus Christ. Even Christians cannot stay strong in this relationship with God without being constantly reminded about the Lord Jesus Christ through God's Word. First and foremost, God's will is that we will know God through the Lord Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Daily prayer is also intended by God as part of the Christian's intentional effort to remain in Christ. Prayer was very important to Jesus on a daily basis. Although he was the Son of God, he also faced temptation from the world and the devil. So it is likewise important for us to pray daily since we not only struggle against the temptations from the fallen world and the devil, but also against our own fallen, sinful nature. Just as Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians, likewise your pastors pray for your faithfulness in the Gospel, and we encourage you to pray for us and for each other.

Prayer, along with God's Word and Sacraments, can help us to live a more intentional Christian life. When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, then God is feeding us and making us spiritually stronger. Take for instance the other two readings today. The story of the Good Samaritan shows us what it means to love our neighbor. In this story, the neighbor turns out to be a person that a Samaritan traditionally hated; but the Samaritan is able to set aside his hatred and instead follow God's will and help his neighbor in all his physical needs.

The reading from Leviticus is a more explicit commentary on the 10 Commandments. It shows us that there is much more to each commandment than appears on the surface. When you are getting food for yourself, plan from the beginning to provide food for those who cannot acquire it sufficiently for themselves in the present, just as many of us are bringing our own food offerings today for LMS. The Leviticus reading goes on to say that we should not lie or deceive, pervert justice, or show partiality. It says that we should not hate our brother in our hearts, seek revenge, or bear a grudge against someone. It finally concludes that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we do so because it is the Lord God who is telling us to do it. This is God's will for all people. Just as it pleases God when we are growing in God's Word and we obey God's will through the commandments, we can be more intentional in the fruit we bear with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can volunteer with one of the ministries of the congregation or of the church at large, such as with LMS or NCEON or other Christian organizations. These are ways that we can touch people with the Gospel of Jesus and bear fruit for God. We can also continue to look for opportunities to share our faith with others through our personal witness about the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection or through our bringing them to church services. As faithful Christians, we can be more intentional in the time we spend with God's Word and Sacraments, in prayer, in obedience to the commandments, and in service and witness of Christ to others.

What results from such intentional Christ-Living? In the end we share in the gift of heaven which those who have gone before us in faith of Jesus Christ already enjoy. Heaven and eternal life is a gift from God to you because of the death of Jesus Christ, and it is called an inheritance, just as people sometimes receive property after a death of a loved one. Out of God's great love for you, Christ's death made possible your inheritance of heaven and eternal life.

With this inheritance of heaven you receive patience to wait for that day, as well as joy as you anticipate it. For this life, however long as it is for each one of us, is not a burden for us as if we need now to achieve perfection in obedience of God's requirements by the law, but rather is a life of freedom so we can enjoy all that God has given to us in this great creation, while also joyfully returning thanks to God each day in our service and worship of God.

Jesus made possible our joyful response in intentional Christ-living. Jesus is the Good Samaritan who saw our broken condition due to our sin and did something about it, even when we were God's enemies. He willingly stopped on the side of the road to pick us up in our wounded and broken condition due to our sin, where we were left for dead by our enemy the devil. He took our sins upon himself at the cross, and there he paid the debt we owed when he shed his blood as a sacrifice to satisfy the holiness of God. God accepted the sacrifice of his Son and raised him from death. The marvelous result of Christ's life, death and resurrection is that we have the entire forgiveness of our sins, and so we can be sure that we are part of God's family now and forever, and so that we can intentionally live our lives for Christ.

We must never treat casually our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Nor must we ever be content with where we are in our spiritual lives. God wants to give us much more. Therefore, we can seek to be more intentional in our Christ-living.

Immerse yourself in God's Word and prayer, seek to understand better and follow God's commandments and will for your lives, anticipate the heavenly inheritance God has given to you through his Son, and join one of the church's ministries in service to Christ. Intentional Christ-Living is God's plan for you and a great way to experience, with other Christians, the same joy that invigorates the new Christian and sustains the lifelong Christian.

soli deo gloria