

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
July 22, 2007

Christ in You

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

I think it would be safe to say that we're all different. We come from different places, different status in life. We have different jobs. We have different likes and dislikes. Though we share some similarities, for the most part, we're different. However, we each share one common thread: we are all sinners living in a sinful world. It's not something that we care to acknowledge about ourselves, but it's true nonetheless.

We think that overall, we're pretty good, for the most part, maybe. That's where we're wrong. We are not good people. We're not even close to being good people. We can try to be good people, but we're not. Even the apostle Paul, chief of sinners in his own eyes, is the first to tell you that you're not good. He looked at his own life, that of the chief killer of Christians until his eyes were opened by Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. When the scales fell off of his eyes, he saw his sinfulness. He knew that he was a sinner. Everywhere that Paul went, his message was the same: that the people he visited were sinners and were in need of salvation. The salvation which you need cannot be found in you or in the things of this world. True salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Paul was not one to mince words. Paul knew what he had learned from Jesus and he did not back down from that teaching. In our text for today, Paul gives the Colossians a history lesson, a reminder from where they came and a picture of what is to come: "*And*

you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...”

Paul reminds these Christians of the gravity of their former state. Satan’s evil power had so manipulated them that they had lived in a state of alienation from God. This alienation had revealed itself in their hostility and hatred of the Lord; and they had suppressed the truth revealed in nature and their consciences. Paul points out that their alienation and hatred had been especially apparent “in the sphere of” their lives, their evil behavior. There was certainly nothing in them that could have contributed in any way to a change in their former relationship to the holy God.

For some reason, there are those who think that the Bible is irrelevant, that it doesn’t apply to today. It was written 2000+ years ago. All the letters which Paul wrote to the churches applied to them and the state they were in; they don’t apply to us because this is a different time, this is the 21st century! All the things which Jesus spoke about sin, all of that applied to different people. We’re not like them. We’re good people. The ironic thing is that what Paul wrote to the churches and all the things which Jesus spoke about do apply to us because, like it or not, we are not good.

There was only one time that we were good. At the time of creation, when God made man, He declared us to be good. All of that changed once Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. When that happened, our status went from good to evil. From that moment on, we became something which we had never been before: sinners.

That is something which we don't like to be reminded of. It ruins our perception of us being good people. But Paul knew that he wasn't a good person. When his eyes were opened, he saw that he was sinful. But more than that, he knew who Jesus Christ was: the very Son of God who came to be our Savior.

Before, our relationship to God had been characterized by hatred and hostility; but now, that relationship is characterized by reconciliation and atonement with God, a "return" to what the relationship between God and his people was intended to be and what that relationship was in Eden. It was worked out in the all-sufficient suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Son's reconciling work was to endure all to present the Colossians and all people holy, cleansed from all sin and separated to God; without blemish, as a perfect sacrifice; and free from accusation" by anyone, and especially by the arch-enemy Satan.

In other words, in God's presence, there is absolutely nothing left against us. The slate has been wiped clean. Christ, who is the power holding everything together, brings it all back to God, and clears away the guilt and self-dissatisfaction in the atoning process.

These are words which you think we might enjoy hearing. These are words which you think would bring comfort all of us who are sinful creatures. But these aren't words which we want to hear. It strikes a blow to our ego. It somehow makes us less of a person to acknowledge that we are a sinner. Paul wasn't out to make friends or to stroke a person's ego. He definitely is not doing that here. His goal was to bring the church at Colossae to Christ and turn them from the "better way," a false philosophy which denied the all-sufficiency of Christ and His work.

The purpose of Paul, of myself and Pastor Firminhac and all ministers of the Gospel, is to preach to you the Gospel, “*to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*” You are His saints, the church. You are the beloved children of God which were dead in sin. You are the ones for which God sent His one and only Son, to redeem and make sinless.

The point of Paul’s message is in three simple words: “*Christ in you.*” The *same* Christ who created and redeemed all that we know (and all that we can neither see nor know), the *same* Christ who rules with a supremacy we cannot begin to fathom, can also be localized in the heart of any and every believer! The “*riches of the glory of this mystery*” is every believer’s connection to the wider scope of God’s creative and redemptive work. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news in knowing that Christ was born, lived, died, and rose again for you and for me.

The words of Paul, though they may be tough to hear, are important words. Paul’s letter to the Colossians is a reminder to all who hear it of wisdom: where we were without God’s wisdom, “*alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.*” While we were still in that state of being, Christ died for you “*in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach.*” His words are a reminder of what God’s wisdom is doing for us now, “[*making*] *the word of God fully known*” to us through Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for us. Because of the Word of God, it reminds us what God’s wisdom holds out for the future: “*the hope of glory*” in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in true faith until life everlasting, amen.