

4th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B
Church, Radcliff, KY
Colossians 1:3-8
Pastor Paul Horn

June 28, 2009

Faith Lutheran

Walk Together as God's People

- I. In Thankful Prayer for each other
- II. In Loving Service to each other

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 ^a behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

I have a greeting card here from a woman named Jackie Stoll. I don't know Jackie, but she says she writes on behalf of the women's group from a Lutheran church in Oconto Falls, WI. I had to look up Oconto Falls on the internet just to see where it was. (10



hours north of Radcliff) The card was sent by the ladies' group to wish my family Happy Valentines Day. She also wrote, "I want to let you know that our prayers are with you and your family. We understand that there is a new church in progress. God's blessings to you and the church and all the work you do." I've never met Jackie Stoll. She's probably never met any of you. Why send the card? Perhaps the common bond in the Lutheran faith, maybe she knows how encouraging it is to hear that someone is praying for you... What prompted her to do this?

Our lesson this morning is from the apostle Paul's letter to a congregation in a town called Colosse, in what is present-day Turkey. Paul mentions a man by the name of Epaphras in his letter. Other portions of Scripture tell us that this man had been converted to Christianity in Ephesus while Paul had been there. Epaphras then carried the good news of Jesus to the folks in Colosse. Epaphras now found himself in Rome to visit Paul, who was in prison, to report to the dear old apostle the doctrinal problems his congregation was experiencing, but also to share with Paul the fruits of faith the gospel was producing among the members of his congregation.

Paul in turn writes this letter, Colossians, to thank God for their fruits of faith; their love for all the saints.

He encourages the saints in Colosse by telling them that he remembered the Colossians in his prayers, thanking God for working through them. Then, Paul pin-points the motivation for their acts of service, "**Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you heard in the Word of truth, the gospel.**" (vs5) The gospel motivated these saints to good works. The gospel: the good news that Jesus came to rescue them from their sins and take them to heaven. This is also why Jackie Stoll sent us a card, telling us that the saints in Oconto Falls, WI are praying for you and me.

This is where I have to stop and think, "Do I always show the same love to the saints that I know, much less the ones I do not? Do I pray continually for my brothers and sisters in Christ, thanking God for them? Or are the words that come off my lips words of hurtful criticism, rudeness and complaining? Do I even take time to pray on behalf of all the saints, or do I allow the busyness of my schedule to push quiet conversation with my Savior out of my life? Do I continually aim to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ, or am I always complaining about their lack of service? Do I strive to show love to all the saints, even if they do not show the same love to me?"

This is what God demands from all of us; to love Him above all else, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. But we don't... for several reasons. One of them is that our sinful nature makes it difficult to carry out God's demands. Either we're too full of ourselves, extremely prideful or more concerned about being offended than forgiving. But I wonder, how can I show love in service to other saints, fellow believers who have been made holy through the blood of Christ, how can I offer the prayers of thanksgiving for these fellow believers, if I do not first experience God's love for myself? Is not this our main problem?

We don't always pray in thanksgiving for each other, we don't love because we don't

take the time to allow the gospel to bear fruit and grow, as Paul says in vs6, for ourselves. You know that a flower or a garden plant needs fertilizer, water and sunlight to grow. In the same way, I need to be fed and watered by the Means of Grace; the Gospel in God's Word and Sacrament. It tells me of God's love for me through Christ. It reassures me that my sins are forgiven and as a result I have a sure hope of heaven. But if I do not give Christ's gospel the time to feed me, and not just for an hour or two on Sunday morning, but every day, then I will not love, nor give thanks in prayer.

Do you remember the story about the two sisters, Mary and Martha, who invited Jesus and his disciples over for dinner? Martha was very concerned about being the "hostess with the most-est." Busy with the cleaning, setting the table, the cooking and baking, setting out the wine, after all, it's not everyday the Savior of the world comes to dine at your home. You can almost picture her flying around the house. But where was her sister Mary? Surely she did not want to be embarrassed by a burnt dinner, or messy tables and floors? She was sitting on the floor at her Savior's feet, listening to him teach her about the kingdom of God. When Martha questioned Jesus about this and told him to tell her sister to help her, Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried about many things. But Mary has chosen the one thing needful."

But my dear friends, neither Mary, nor the apostle Paul, nor Epaphras nor Jackie Stoll for that matter, have met God's demands. Even though they have demonstrated their faithfulness to God's Word, to prayer and to acts of love, they have not done as God commands. Like you and me, they too have fallen short of God's glory, fallen short of heaven, fallen short of perfection. And that's precisely why the Holy Spirit sent someone like an Epaphras or an Apostle Paul, to share the Word of truth with you, to tell you about the hope that is kept safe for you in heaven.

This hope is not a, "I hope the weather doesn't get any hotter." It's a confidence, an unwavering hope. This hope is that Jesus came and satisfied all of God's demands for us. Where you and I have been lacking in love for the saints in our prayer life, the gospel writers show us that Jesus constantly went off by himself to pray. Jesus told Simon Peter directly that he had prayed for him, that "Satan will not sift you like wheat." In his High Priestly prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for all his disciples all over the world. He even prayed for those who crucified him. Your Savior's faithfulness in prayer stands in the way of our unfaithfulness. God the Father sees Christ Jesus' good works, not our works that fall short.

Where we have been lacking in our unfaithfulness with God's Word, the gospel writers show us that Jesus made it his habit to attend the synagogue every Sabbath. Jesus has done what I could not do. His perfection stands in place of my failure to be faithful with his Word.

And finally, where we have failed to show love to all the saints, and this love Paul writes about is (in the Greek language) agape love; selfless, sacrificing love. Jesus showed that kind of love to all people, by meeting the Father's demand for sins, death; he died for all sinners, even for those who did not and do not love him. He sacrificed his life blood to

meet the Father's demand that blood must be shed to atone for sins. Jesus paid the price, as we said last Sunday, "...not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood, and his innocent sufferings and death."

That's the hope we have kept safe for us in heaven; the sure confidence that our Savior met God's demands; as a result you receive forgiveness of all your sins, Christ's righteousness is your righteousness, heaven itself is yours. That hope is kept safe for you in heaven, like the gold in Fort Knox, like the crown jewels in the Tower of London, and no one can take your sure hope of heaven away from you.

So I ask again, what moved the apostle Paul to continually pray for the saints in Colosse? What motivated Jackie Stoll to write what she did in that letter? What moves you and me to walk together as God's people, to say prayers of thanksgiving for each other, to show our love to each other in acts of service and forgiveness? What moves me to set aside time in my busy schedule to sit down at the feet of my Savior every day? What causes me to set aside time for prayer? What causes me to show love to all the saints through acts of service? The love that my Savior showed to me through his life and death.

I have another letter here that was sent last week. It is from Pastor John Beck and his wife Cindy. Pastor Beck is the pastor at Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church in Reno, NV. Perhaps some of you remember Pastor Beck. He was our Mission Shepherd for some time and even preached at Faith Lutheran once or twice. Allow me to read their letter:

Dear Pastor Horn and members of Faith,

Recently I heard of the difficult decision to discontinue Synod funding for Faith in Radcliff. I was also pleased to receive the letter you sent to the Board for Home Missions expressing gratitude for all the support that has been given over the years.

As you past shepherd representing the Southeastern Wisconsin District Mission Board I know firsthand of the financial struggles you have faced and the challenges there to reach self-support as a congregation. I am grateful that you are moving forward with your ministry and endeavoring to continue to have and support a full-time pastor. I am confident that God will continue to bless the gospel ministry that you conduct in His name. In these difficult times it is good to ponder again that we have "treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2Cor 4:7).

With those thoughts in mind, accept this check from my wife and me in support of our partnership in the gospel. Please deposit \$500 into your operating fund and \$500 into your building fund. I pray that our gift will encourage you and assist you with your plans and goals.

May God richly bless you all!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor John and Cindy Beck

This check and letter is not from the congregation in Reno, but from Pastor Beck and his wife. Why did Pastor Beck and his wife Cindy write these nice words? Why were they so generous? Surely they could have used the money at their congregation or the brand new Lutheran mission in Sparks, NV. Why? Because of the love the Savior has showed to them, because they continue to experience that love everyday through the gospel. I pray that you all walk together as God's people, in thankful prayers for each other, and in loving service to one another. I pray that your motivation is the gospel. Amen.
