

Pentecost 7 “Rooted in Christ” Colossians 2 6-15

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Let’s look closely at the first sentence of our Epistle reading. The beginning phrase, “as you received Christ,” is the reception we have been talking about the last couple of weeks in this little letter. This is the Jesus who shed His red and sticky blood on Calvary to reconcile to Himself all things, even the bad things, everything.

The phrase “Christ Jesus the Lord” is something of a “double creed.” The faith of the Colossians is faith in Jesus of Nazareth as both “Christ”, the promised Messiah and as “Lord”, the one who revealed Himself in Old Testament times by the name Yahweh. The phrase “so walk in Him” is often used in both testaments with an ethical connotation, denoting one’s way of life or sanctified life in faith. In English we would more likely say “be living.”

Paul describes the status of being “in Christ” with two participles, one from horticulture, “rooted,” and the other from construction, “built up,” both of whose meanings indicate something solid and enduring. Both the participles “root” and “built up” are in the passive voice, which in this context implies that firmness of faith is not a quality or virtue that we ourselves can produce. Rather, Christian faith is created in us by God, and perseverance with firm faith likewise is the result of the activity of God, who works in us through the means of grace—the Word and Sacraments.

These gifts of God root us, they build us up, and they establish us in the faith, the relationship with Him. God’s great act of love in Jesus establishes me, not me establishing me, but God is the actor, the doer here. Just as we were taught, abounding in thanksgiving, which is our response to these marvelous gifts.

What is Paul talking about here? Well, in the late service we will see and participate in the incarnation of this “being rooted in Jesus” thing. We see and remember how God combined His all-powerful Word, by whom, through whom

and in whom all things are created, sustained and preserved, with the simple water of holy Baptism.

And in doing so, our sins and Dylan's die with Christ, and we are raised with Christ to new life which will find its culmination in the resurrection to life everlasting.

By God's Word in preaching and Baptism and Holy Communion and Confession and Absolution, we are empowered to see that no one takes us captive by some empty deceit, or the philosophy of human tradition which is promoted by the faithless eyes of this world.

And what is this philosophy of the world? If you follow this down to verse 16, it gets easier. The empty philosophy of the world is that we must do something, some new moon festival, some Sabbath observance, some "thing" which will make us acceptable. This is the sword which the rulers and authorities wielded so effectively against us and which Christ ripped from their hands when he rose from the dead and after dying on the cross. The worldly philosophy is that you must earn your salvation, you must get something "right" before God can love you. Be aware, we can turn faith, prayer, or just about anything into such a "payment" rendered to God to which, supposedly, He then responds to with His love.

The philosophy of Christ is that He loved us first, before we did any of these things. It happened in Jesus's work on the cross; it happened in Baptism.

The world sees forces at work, elemental spirits, evolutionary dogmas and materialism, but they do not see Christ or even a generic god for that matter. Now I am not anti-science by any stretch of the imagination. I believe the whole fight which often pits creation against evolution is misguided and foolish. Science does what science does, and I am glad of that. But in truth, scientists, even many who are Christians, are really pretty blind to some basic things. They have fallen captive to a philosophy of the age. They operate in a world in which God simply never factors into the formulas and equations of their work. As a result, they have often effectively trained their minds to operate in a godless world. The best of them have recognized this, and they realize the philosophical mistake of this functional atheism. Francis Collins, John Polkinghorne, Owen Gingrich, Ian Barbour and many others have written extensively about this. Collins headed up

the human genome project and wrote a great little book “The Language of God” which I recommend.

About every two years or so, Polkinghorne writes another book on the subject. He had been the head of a science department at Cambridge prior to entering the ministry and field of theology. These men speak of a field of which they know a great deal. The basic thrust of what these scholars write is that science cannot truly answer the largest questions of the human experience. It is very good at describing things but not explaining things. This is not a matter of indifference. The current spirit of the age which would ask science to answer all questions often results in a very dark nihilism.

Jesus said that by their fruit we will know them. We are facing an epidemic of suicide among the young people of our world who have given up any hope for success in a world which only finds value in how much money you make, success on some competitive field of play, or in being a truly interesting person with a million Twitter followers. This generation is in crushing need of hearing that the value of a human being resides somewhere else. In this Babe of Bethlehem and the Carpenter who hung on a cross, in this Christ in whom the totality of God dwells. He gives meaning to life, purpose, grace, and beauty.

Paul tells us that we all have been filled with the Christ who is the head of all rule and authority. Therefore, when we speak a word of forgiveness, it echoes throughout heaven itself as if God has spoken it, because God has spoken it in us. People whom the world judges to be failures can speak these words of cosmic significance, and the devils quake when he or she says it. The indwelling of Christ not only infuses our language, it also infuses our minds and our whole being. Here is the answer to those empty philosophies: Christ is in us and keeps us through His Spirit.

In Paul’s day, this was a fight about circumcision, so that shows up here in the text. But in our day, we focus on baptismal language, the cosmic creation language. Buried with Christ, we were also raised with Him through the potent work of God. Dead in sins, God has made us alive with Christ in His sinless purity. He has cancelled the record of our debt, the stain of our sinful past.

Sin demanded our punishment and eternal death, but God has set this aside, He has removed it by nailing it to the cross in the body of His Son, Jesus. And therefore, even the terrible Satanic foes who mean us harm are disarmed in Christ. He has put them to shame; they run away, tails tucked between their legs. So, where do we really put our hopes and our confidences? The God who has revealed Himself to us has revealed His love for us in the person and the work of Jesus. The world wants either something more dramatic or something it can control. The Greeks of Paul's day were scandalized at the very notion that a god would come in human form and take on flesh with all its frailty and even die. It was simply beneath God to do such a thing, at least from their human perspective. Many today end up in a similar place but for very different reasons. God is up there, but the actual things of life are not connected to Him but to scientifically described processes. But as we noted above, science describes them, but does not explain them. For explanation, one really needs God.

What limits would we put on God lest he look too ungodlike in our estimation? What does our mind tell us? What does He say? Are we scandalized by the conversation He had with Abraham in Genesis 18? Should we be?

Who is judging us about new moons and ascetic practices today? My guess is that we Christians are largely ignored on these accounts or perhaps counted as quaint if we should give something up for Lent. Even a weekly worship habit is simply a peculiar thing we do which no one expects to be passed along to the next generation. No one really cares, do they?

But we have reason to care. We have reason to hope. For the God who loves us proved it by coming to us in human flesh, by dying to pay the price of our sins, by rising again from the dead that we may have new life. And He roots us deeply in His salvation by Baptism and His Word. He builds us up by His persistent forgiveness in Confession and Absolution and His body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. All this without any merit or worthiness in us...a priceless gift. A sure and certain hope!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!