

**Christ at the center of our faith | Colossians 1:15-28 | Luke 10:38-42 | LUMC | 7,
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By Rev Grace Kanake

Dear Church family and friends: we shall continue with Paul's letter to the Colossian church today. Last week we learned the origin, composition and location of the church in Colossae. We heard Paul's gratitude for the desire that church's members to relate to one another, to love Christ, and to live a practical Christian life.

This church strived to practice the right beliefs and teachings (dogma and doctrine) in their lives. Indeed, they were bold Christians: they knew their spiritual and physical limits and they did not allow their human physical limitations to define and override their faith.

In today's reading I perceive Paul raising a few pertinent spiritual questions:

- Do you know Christ?
- Do you ask Christ for help when you encounter temptations and sufferings?
- Do you trust Christ and depend on his saving grace?

St Paul raises these questions because they form the basis of Christian beliefs and precepts. We daily struggle to answer them, and in that sense, we are Christ-like and dependent of his saving grace.

St Paul explains his understanding of Christ and why he connects with Christ and wants believers to do the same. He establishes the identity of Christ by quoting St John to remind the Colossians and us that Jesus Christ was, before all things were made, enjoying an unbroken relationship with the invisible God. Jesus Christ, the visible God, became incarnate to save those who believe in him from the pangs of sin and death. St Paul centers his faith in Jesus and wants us to do the same. Jesus truly identifies with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is Emanuel, the second person in the triune God.

Through God, Jesus was born into the universe to save humanity by power of example. He lived among mortals, eating with sinners, welcoming minorities—Gentiles—to share God's grace with him, preaching to the unwanted, the prostitutes, the leprous, the blind, the homeless. Also, he warned the political class: the emperor and his staff, the religious pretenders, the high priests and temple staff. Jesus finally goes to the cross to birth the church. St Paul uses imagery to define Jesus' identity. He speaks of "body" to define those who belong to the faith, and the church as the community of faith. These symbols have tremendous bearing on our faith now and in the future. Let us pause to consider each of them.

St Paul uses imagery to help the believer connect with the invisible God. In Old Testament times, God never revealed his shape to humanity. Moses was told to wear an eye mask to prevent him from seeing God. The belief then was that "If one sees God he or she will die". St Paul says the invisible God chose to reveal his Godself

through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Image of God. “If you have seen me, you have seen the father. Don’t you believe me?”¹ Jesus replied to Phillip.

When God called me to the ministry, I knew it was a God who looks like me; God who shares my physical features, and that I should reflect that image of God in all my thoughts, actions and life. This is particularly so in today’s Scripture reading. St Paul is not concerned about God’s height, weight, or gender. Jesus also, in answering Phillip, did not say it either except to say that God looks like him.

People have different interpretations of this God, but I hold to what the Bible teaches me and to what Jesus stands for. I am sure other believers are with me about God’s Image. Jesus cannot lie. God is like him physically. So, Paul speaks to us about Jesus being the visible image of God from whom we experience God the Son. May this God be our shield and defender in time of political turmoil, economic downturn, spiritual apathy, and physical pain!

When the evil one strikes, we can hide behind this imaged God. He will deflect the arrows shot to harm you. God will turn darkness into light and hopeless situations into celebrations. I am a true believer in this God. He is constantly present and ready to walk with us every step of the way. Paul knew that the secret of overcoming temptations was to center his faith on this God in Christ.

Another symbol Paul uses is the body, and Jesus talking to Martha affirms that the body does many tasks. But the better task is to get connected with God through the Word—the Good News. Both of today’s readings refer to the physical body and the community-of-faith body—the church that ought to be of one mind in thoughts and actions.

Let us focus for a moment on the physical body—my body and yours—both created in the image of God. During the early church, people held different opinions about the body. There was a belief that Jesus’ body housed the Holy Spirit who left during crucifixion, and it is only the physical Jesus who died. The separation of body and Spirit remains an important issue, but Christians can believe that Jesus never taught that the physical body is less important. We have body politics of shaming others. We have science teaching against anorexia and social economic issues that relegate segments of the society to unhealthy diets.

Body issues are many, but Jesus is concerned on how we balance our tasks, so we do not harm even our spiritual life. I love my body and I tend it in a way to reflect my faith. I keep it clean, I feed it with healthy a diet, and (though not always), I try to give enough time to sleep, and take any negative thoughts to God in prayer. I know Christ must reign in my body.

There are many issues that make us ignore our body for a time. Some may be from external forces, and some may be a need on our part to work harder to meet a certain goal. We recall that Jesus commends us especially for fasting because some life issues cannot be overcome through simple prayer. However, Jesus does not

¹ John 14:9

commend us to go without food for a long time, ignoring the care of the body, or on the other hand, being so apprehensive about our body image that we devote an excessive amount of time to it.

When Paul talks about the body, he commends it to be healthy for the ministry. Paul was a hard worker. When speaking to the Thessalonians, he tells them, “If you do not work, do not eat”.² So it is important to labor for our food and life’s needs. I work to earn a living and to feed my family. Most of you are retired, so you live now on what you saved when you worked. Therefore, God encourages us to do everything in moderation. That is why Jesus says doing bodily tasks is good but being spiritual is better. We may be deprived of our health and wealth but not our Spirituality.

The word “church” would mean a building, the place where we receive baptism, partake in Holy Communion, and listen to Word preached. Church buildings are unlimited in sizes and shapes, but what is common for all Protestants are the four central items that stand on the altar:

- The pulpit where the Word is preached;
- The lectern where scripture is read;
- The baptism font and;
- The Holy Communion table.

These four items promote the message: “Christ is the head of the Church, both the building and the community of faith”. You can see the Holy Communion table is at the center of the four items. We love our building and want it to last! We are *everything* church and that is why we stand proud for having been over 138 years in this community.

The community of faith consists of believers bound together by baptismal vows, salvation of the body and the soul, adhering to the rubrics of their denomination and believing that the Word of God, “is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself or herself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”³ The Word helps us to center our faith in Christ. Being people of God, let us devote all good works to God, our creator and Savior. Every aspect of our being ought to give praise to God.

Paul and most of us here are concerned because so many people today live to enjoy the things of the world. Still others do things for self-praise and seek to receive the glory due to God. I always attribute every success in my life, my job and my thoughts to God. I have felt that all blessings come from above and not by works, however much I may contribute to that success. Faith and works are the hallmark of Methodist beliefs and teaching. But the outcome of our works is by grace, and the glory is to God. God makes things happen. Paul again warns us, “Those who use the things of

² 2nd Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 4:7

³ Proverbs 15: 32 & 29:15

the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”⁴ Too many people act as if they will not pass away.

I will bring this sermon to a close with wisdom from another preacher. “When we think of the saints departed, and remember their patience in suffering, their diligence in labor, their ardor, their self-denial, their humility, their tears, their prayers, their midnight cries, their intercession for the souls of others, their pouring out their hearts before God for the glory of Christ, why we shrink into less than nothing, and find no word of boasting on our tongue. If we survey the life of the only Perfect One, our dear Lord and Master, the sight of His beauty covers our whole countenance with a blush.” May our faith center in Christ. Amen

⁴ (1 Corinthians 7:31 NIV84)