

On Our Knees| Luke 11:1-13; Colossians 9:6-15 | LUMC | July 24, 2022
By Rev Grace Kanake

Dear Church family and friends: today we continue to expound on St Paul's interaction with the Colossian Church. In his previous conversations, St Paul expressed his prayers for the Colossian Christians. He described and affirmed the identity of Christ to them as the visible image of the invisible God. St Paul insisted Christians must ground their faith in Christ despite their human desire to fulfil bodily tasks that should come second. The first goal is following Christ.

The Colossians were contending with local human traditions, including the worship of many gods and the honoring of human knowledge and wisdom rather than God. They had forgotten such a belief was a means to itself; they encountered multiple Christian belief systems. They were in a dwindling economy designed to favor the rich echelons of society, and the local politics were divisive.

In the Christian church of today we have our own share of problems, though slightly different from that of the Colossians: The Church problems are numerous, I will mention only a few today: We are constantly dealing with our cultural gender inequality wherein the male is forcing or demanding the female to listen to him and stop making her own decisions, even about her own well-being. This male factor is felt not only in politics and in the economy, but it is practiced in some homes. And the same male domination is in the church, unfortunately. The female voice is being curtailed in many ways. Current politics have greatly abridged women's decisions, even regarding their own bodies. There is encouraging news, Jesus is always on the side of the weak and despised. Jesus made the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob to have her voice, the legion to heal and Zachariah to have a baby, John.

We are clearly frightened and reluctant to close our church due to low membership, and we are not alone. Most evangelical denominations face the same dilemma. The other elephant in the room is that some evangelical church leaders who do not know or ignore their church rubrics and their church beliefs and teachings. Such leaders fight their system's theology, and beliefs, and encourage the secular way of solving spiritual issues. (Secular methods are divisive; they encourage holier-than-thou attitudes).

The church's beliefs, teachings and decisions are also being affected by politics ever since the evangelical churches began this downward spiral into a minority status!

I have been reading a lot to try to understand why churches have begun to behave this way, and to increasingly accommodate unjust politics. There are hints that being in the minority, churches are alarmed; they might be taking a back seat, allowing their status to be defined by politicians.

Is it possible that the evangelical churches, now in the minority, are being consumed by their own creatures? I have read the history of the American church and have learned that most church members of various denominations initiated many companies that are now controlling the economy. And the American politicians of prior

years were devoted Christians. Today that has changed. Those who love the church and practice their faith in their lives are few and as a result, faith is being consumed by politics and commercialism. The church is being preoccupied by her own creatures, not unlike Frankenstein's monster, an English fictional character Mary Shelley describes in her 1818 book. Mary wrote that Victor Frankenstein was able to build the creature in his laboratory and later the creature turned against him and his stated goals of creating it.

I have learned much about church history generally, and in the book by St Francis Asbury, an American saint. The bulk of the initial North American populace was born of the Europeans who left Europe to a place they could worship without being forced and monitored by the politicians.

Ultimately, the church was born on American soil with freedom of worship and an American Constitution, of which, has a connection to the Bible. The framers of this Constitution were Christians who trusted God to bring blessings, and they summed that up, in our American motto, "In God We trust". Out of Christian labors a free government was born, a free-flowing economy was initiated, education was given priority, and health care institutions to care for the residents were given priority. Our Christian ancestors built the structures we cherish today.

However, over time, some economists and businesspeople began to flaunt the rules that made it. For example, a store in Minnesota was the first to open for business on Sunday. Gradually, more business started opening on Sundays. It was not long before economists began to use Christian names in food: Angel and devil Food cake mix, and devilled ham started appearing in markets.

The church's celebrative seasons such as Easter and Christmas have become huge commercial events. Church teachings, to say the least, appear to have been overpowered and absorbed in the mob psyche.

The last straw that has broken the camel's back is giving in to unjust politics, and now politics is about to determine how the life of the church and its believers should be conducted. This scenario is likely to take away the role of the being the voice of the voiceless, the role of stabilizing and moderating the society church occupied for over 400 years on American soil. I read recently that evangelical leaders are wondering how they got drawn into the politics of division. Unrelenting discussions continue¹. Talk about Frankenstein's monster!

St Paul affirms that Christians who are rooted, built, and established in faith in Christ can overcome these daily temptations. Those grounded in Christ, must maintain their personal spiritual identity, and avoid the usual trappings of daily living, lest we fail. I say this as an observer: my faith shall sail through these temptations. St Paul encourages us to make sure we are not misled by any means away from our faith grounded in Christ. When each of us overcome temptations, we become a team of the faithful who

¹ Tim Alberta. *How Politics Poisoned the Evangelical Church*. June 2022 Article in the Atlantic. This is informative article and Tim, a writer and staff at Atlantic.

rely upon Christ to build his church on us, to preach and to live our faith. The Colossian church survived the daily temptations because they listened to Jesus' call to prayer and St Paul's encouragements, they stayed focused on their church rubrics, the right doctrine and the right Christian teachings. Bravely bore through unjust economic system, divisive politics and through prayer, their faith matured.

Paul calls us to pray with him and encourages us to believe in the power of prayer. Jesus insists ceaseless prayer shall be answered. Jesus confirmed answered persistent prayers with an example of the person who woke his friend at night and got what he wanted.

Prayer must be accompanied by action: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." It is true that we love our children and give them what they ask if we are able. God does the same to us.

Let me draw another historical example to confirm the teachings of St Paul and Jesus on overcoming temptations and praying.

The American church faced a membership decline in 1730, when only 10 percent of Americans attended church. In 1734 God raised up preachers, including John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, among others. These preachers preached in fields, on streets and in churches. Church attendance rose from 10 percent to 50 percent during the "Great Awakening" of the 18th century. The American founding fathers, including George Washington, and the American Constitution are products of that period.

When the American church was facing decline again in the 20th century due to an emphasis on modernity and science,² God raised the Holiness, Pentecostal and Fundamentalist movements in the 1900s to revive the church.

And since the 1990s we have been experiencing a new resurgence of non-doctrinal preachers, biblical interpreters and theologians that has encouraged planting of missional churches. We must pray to God to help us focus on growing people in faith, and to be careful that popular culture is not diverting us away from our belief system. We will grow! We need not allow wrong teachings, mob fear, secularism, and bad politics to steal our faith! Let us "hold fast to the head—Christ—from whom the whole body is nourished and held together". In Jesus name, Amen.

² I love science but I am aware it is the human created knowledge and should not rely on it 100%. It can be means to itself if not properly checked.