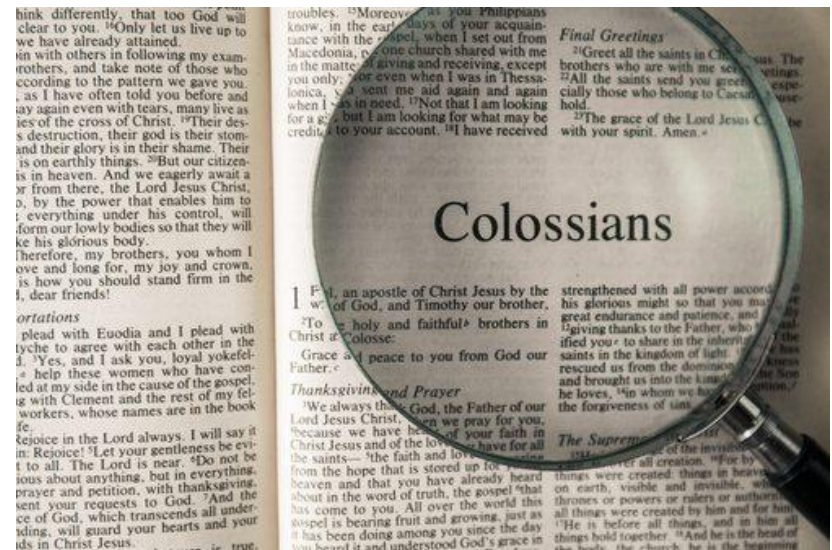


Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

Colossians part 1



Sunday 20th September – Saturday 3rd October

Introduction

Colossae was a prosperous city in what is now modern Turkey and was wealthy from the wool trade. It is one of the seven churches referred to in Revelation and close to Laodicea. It was evangelised either by Paul or his co worker Epaphras. The Letter shows Paul to be in prison but it's not stated where. There was a large Jewish population in Colossae which had tense relations with the fledgling church. The city never recovered from an earthquake in the year 60. There is doubt as to whether Paul wrote the letter and scholars debate whether it was written by Paul or by a follower of his. The letter presents Christ as the first born of all creation, first born from the dead, the head of the Church and source of its authority, direction and nourishment.

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Sunday 20th September Psalm 15

Sam Goodman, Elder, Central URC, Derby

1 Lord, who may dwell
within your house
and on your holy hill?
All those who walk
a blameless way,
who love the right,
who win the day
with truthful words and,
come what may,
will speak no word of ill:

2 All those who
love their neighbour well,
who hate the way of sin,
who honour all
that fear the Lord,
whose promise is
a binding cord,
who help, and seek
no rich reward
these, Lord, you welcome in.

rejoice. Let us give thanks for the way that the Gospel has spread in word and deed despite lockdown and let us rejoice for our brothers and sisters who minister with us in places and ways we can't.

Dear God,

We rejoice in your goodness and blessings.

Lift up our eyes beyond all that seems to imprison and constrain us.

Let your Gospel, your Good News reach beyond us to those who need to hear it today. Amen

assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, 'See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.'

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Reflection

Two friends had to get to the island airport. They didn't have any transport and so set off on foot hoping to hitch a lift. But there weren't any vehicles on the road. They knelt down and screwed up their eyes in earnest prayer. When they opened their eyes, they saw the back of a bus disappearing into the distance; the moral of the story is watch and pray! As I write this over the last few weeks we have been encouraged to keep alert because of the ongoing threat of COVID-19. Keeping alert has been associated with illness, danger and even fear. Here Paul is associating it with thanksgiving. He rejoices despite his circumstances – he is in prison with no prospect of being released. Hopefully as you read this we will be experiencing greater freedoms. But Paul encourages us to be thankful in all circumstances. He is able to count his blessings and recognises that God is at work. He is thankful for his friends, companions and fellow ministers. He doesn't see his imprisonment as an impediment to the spread of the Gospel. God's love cannot be constrained by a cell or chains. But he also recognises that it is not just about him, he affirms his fellow workers for the sake of the Gospel. And above all else he recognises the power of prayer.

Whatever our circumstances might be, may we not forget the power of prayer, but let us keep our eyes open to see what God is doing and

After Psalm 15, Paul Wigmore (born 1925) © Paul Wigmore/Jubilate Hymns
you can hear the tune here
https://www.jubilate.co.uk/songs/lord_who_may_dwell_within_your_house

Reflection

Who is worthy? Who can enter the hill, the temple or even the Holy of Holies? The answer back when the Psalm was written was that very few people were considered worthy, and they had to go through the ritual of dressing the right way, saying exactly the right words of the right prayer, and of course they had to adhere to the minutiae of law and be the right gender.

Who of us would have been worthy? But by grace, because of the Cross, through salvation we can all now dwell in the house of the Lord. The Temple curtain has been torn and there is now nothing that separates us from the love of God. All are welcome.

But to dwell in God's home, to truly remain there we need to think, speak and act in ways that show that we belong. The Psalmist shows that there are expectations of us. We must love what is right and truthful, and be selfless. We don't act to gain acceptance, we are already accepted even with the flaws we have, unlike the temple in the time of Jesus where anything or anyone with blemishes was turned away.

Knowing and feeling this love and acceptance from God surely spurs us on to share this way of living that is so different from the way the world is. The invitation from Jesus to come and share what is prepared isn't just for a future in heaven, it's an invitation (in the words of Belinda Carlisle) to prove that heaven is a place on earth. God's house has its doors open. Our challenge is to demonstrate that there is room for everyone in the house of the Lord.

Prayer

Loving God, You welcome us into your home with open arms. It is a

welcome full of love rather than judgement. It is an offer of hope instead of fear. Help us to extend your invitation to dwell in your home to a world that needs to know your love. Amen

[Monday 21st September Colossians - Greetings](#)

The Rev'd Dr Elizabeth Welch, retired from pastoral charge, active ecumenically and theologically, member of St Andrew's Church, Ealing.

Colossians 1: 1 - 14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Prayer

Master in heaven,
May I be just and fair to others whenever I know it's possible.
Make me braver in seeking out what's possible in the here and now.
Give me a vision for how the impossible can be made possible.
And all this in your good time - which might be now. Amen.

[Saturday 3rd October Colossians - The Apostolic Spirit and Final Greetings](#)

The Rev'd George Watt, Minister Reigate Park Church

Colossians 4:2 - 18

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow-servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully

Reflection

Wives and husbands, children and fathers – we still have them today. And, let's not kid ourselves, we've still got slaves; some held illegally, some trapped in slave-like working conditions. You can say what you like about the advice in these verses (and lots has been said), but the social and economic relationships they address are as important to us today as they were to people back then.

There's some distance between 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female' (Galatians 3:28) and, 'wives be subject to your husbands ... slaves obey your earthly masters.' No wonder some say that the same person could not have written both.

I've got to say I'm a bit bemused and disappointed with today's advice. Being a child of my time, I've no wish to make my wife subject to me, even 'in the Lord', I wouldn't dream of owning a slave, not even in a nice sort of way. And I don't think these verses authorise me to do either. O that the author had had the guts to be more radical than realistic - "family members will live in equality and all slaves are to be freed forthwith" – not just to advise people to live well within the rules of a very imperfect system.

If I'm really honest, though, I'm not too disappointed. Like most children of any time I've little appetite to have my life uprooted. Today, whilst sipping my fairly traded coffee, I advised some people to join me in donating to Christian Aid, not to destroy the world's skewed trade system, tearing down the pillars of the international economy and society. I don't think they would have done so, even if I had asked. I wonder, how Christians reading Daily Devotions in two thousand years will judge my advice? I hope they will be kind about my realism/pessimism/cowardice [delete as appropriate], but not feel obligated to do just the same as me in their time

Reflection

This letter was written in the context of a different empire from that of today, in a time when Christianity was only just beginning to grow and develop and there were many challenges to faithful following and believing. Yet today, with the decline of Christianity in the west, some of the challenges remain the same – the challenge to find a distinctive Christian identity and to speak and live out the Christian faith with wisdom and understanding.

One of the challenges today is the contemporary emphasis on the 'turn to the self', where 'what I think' or 'what I do' is what matters most, rather than having a loving care for, or being in relation to, one another and God's world.

This letter opens with words that remind us of our mutual belonging – both to God and to one another. This mutual belonging is embodied in our prayer, prayer that opens our lives to God and what God makes possible in our lives.

There were many ups and downs in the life of the early church, as the epistles often demonstrate. What's interesting is that this letter starts not with criticism, but with thanksgiving, followed by a prayer for the people of Colossae, that they may be strengthened in their faith. It's based on the understanding that the people are united in Christ, whatever their differences may be, and that God will lead each one to grow in the knowledge of God and the ability to live out this knowledge in service of others. People are not left on their own. Each one has a place and a purpose in God's love.

In an increasingly polarized world, the possibility that the Christian faith offers for mutual belonging and affirmation, for thanksgiving and wisdom, is an ever more valuable gift.

Prayer

Wise and loving God, fill me with your wisdom and understanding, may I grow daily in my knowledge of you. May my life be pleasing to you. May I bear your fruit in the actions I take. May I be strong with your strength. May I be patient when faced with challenges and in times of difficulty. Fill my heart with thanksgiving for the people with whom you call me to live and share together. Amen.

[Tuesday 22nd September Colossians Christ is the Head of All Creation](#)

The Rev'd Michael Hopkins, Minister of a group of Methodist and United Reformed Churches based around Farnham, Surrey, and Clerk of the URC General Assembly.

Colossians 1: 15-20

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation;
for in him all things were created
in heaven and on earth,
things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers
all things have been created through him and for him.

He himself is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body,
the church.

He is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.
For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,

Forgiving – discounting our right to judge and pass judgment.

Having love. This is the most important characteristic Paul points out. This type of love binds us to God and to others. Love brings about harmony and success within the Body of Christ. We are called to live in community with one another; to learn to love one another, and be tolerant and forgiving and, above all, to encourage one another in what we say giving thanks to God for everything.

Prayer:

God, help us to be compassionate towards others, kind to those who can't offer us anything in return, humble and realize life is not just about us; gentle, and patient. Help us to forgive and to love in every situation. Help us to let peace have the final say in our souls. Help us to find reasons to be thankful in every situation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[Friday 2nd October Colossians - Home and Hearth](#)

The Rev'd Trevor Jamison is minister of St Columba's URC in North Shields

Colossians 3: 18 - 4:1

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reflection

Years ago there was a book entitled “How To Make Friends And Influence People.” Folk wanted to know how they could make others like them. The writer of Colossians was answering those questions, but in a very different way.

The writer says that we should not be trapped in sinful ways and there’s quite a range mentioned; but rather each one of us should be renewed. Our passage then goes on to tell us we need to be people others want to have around if we are to truly make friends. We need to: “Put on ... compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And most importantly, put on love”

So, when we put on the ‘new self’ Paul says it looks like this:

A Compassionate Heart – which is a yearning to meet the needs of those less fortunate.

Kindness – believing that you are not better than others and that you place the needs of others in front of yourself.

Humility – understanding who you are before a holy God.

Meekness – having a gentle spirit but not being a doormat.

Patience – able to be with people in difficult times...

Bearing with one another... being there to lift others up.

by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reflection

Many Bibles set this passage out as prose, but I’ve laid the words out as a poem to emphasise that is a poem, based on the different meanings of the Hebrew word for ‘head’. As in English, so in Hebrew, the relevant word can carry several different ideas, and Paul is cleverly exploring and exploiting some of them.

Jesus Christ, he says, is the firstborn. That’s the first meaning, which comes twice. Jesus Christ is supreme. Jesus Christ is the head of the body, which is the Church. Jesus Christ is the beginning. Paul uses this to remind the Colossians that the more they get to know, and know about, Jesus Christ, the more they will understand who the true God is and what he’s done; who they are as a result; and what it means to live in and for him.

There are three things in particular which the poem reminds us about Jesus:

1. It’s by looking at Jesus that we discover who God is. Jesus is ‘the image of God, the invisible one’. Nobody has ever seen God, but in Jesus he has come near to us and become one of us.
2. Jesus holds together the ordinary world that we live in, and the new world that is to come.
3. Jesus is the blueprint for the genuine humanness which is on offer through the gospel.

As the head of the body, the Church; as the first to rise again from the dead; as the one through whose cruel death God has dealt with our sins and brought us peace and reconciliation; and, above all, as the one through whom the new creation has now begun. in all these ways, Jesus is himself the one in whom we are called to discover the fullness of what the best of being human means.

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, we have not seen you. We don't even know what it might mean to see you, but you have shown us Jesus, and because we have seen him, we have seen you. Help us grasp what it means that everything was created by him who was before all things, and that all these things hold together through him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[Wednesday 23rd September Colossians - Our Share in Salvation](#)

The Rev'd Fiona Thomas is a freelance learning facilitator, and member of Christ Church in Bellingham.

Colossians 1: 21 - 23

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Reflection

“Keep the faith, baby” was a catchphrase in the church group I attended at university in the late 70s, connecting with the Liberation Theology which inspired us. The letter to the church at Colossae expresses it more formally, exhorting listeners to “continue securely established and steadfast in the faith.” A faith that sustained people living in a mixed place, famous for the wool from its sheep, on a trading route between towns, cities and countryside. People who had found in Christ a straightforward alternative to the mystery religions common in the area. Whatever they had been before, they were now won, reconciled and redeemed by his love for them. Their response was to show that love to

find you kneeling at our feet.’

Prayer

Reveal your life within me, Risen Christ.

Reveal your strange glory, made known not in pomp or circumstance, but in grace filled love. Raise me up with you.

[Thursday 1st October - Colossians - Christian Behaviour](#)

The Rev'd Sue Henderson, retired URC minister, member of Bradford on Avon United Church.

Colossians 3: 5 - 17

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Reflection

At first sight these words of Paul seem to reflect a very hierarchical view of the world. God is above – high above us in heaven and we are below, here on earth and we are being called to reach up the ladder to where God and Christ sit in glory. The image from the film, *A matter of life and death* comes to mind with its long moving stairway going up between earth and heaven.’

This hierarchical view dominated our culture for many centuries. It is the kind of world where everything is in order, with the rich and powerful on top and the ordinary folk kept in their rightful place. As that less popular verse of ‘All things bright and beautiful’ puts it: ‘The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, and ordered their estate.’

In Scripture Paul, like John’s Gospel, uses the language of ‘above’ and ‘below’ not to define a spiritual hierarchy but to speak of two orders – that dominated by self and guided by the Spirit of love and compassion. Only a kind of dying and rising again will free us from one order to live as people of a different Way.

So set your minds on the things that are ‘above’ not to reach the top of some spiritual ladder, but to join Christ in his world turning way – God’s Kingdom. He came not to serve but to serve and challenges his disciples do the same. He confronted the abuse of power wherever he found it – in the home, the temple, the city and nation – and calls us to do the same. And he reaches out to us where we are. As Brian Wren put it so beautifully in another hymn, ‘we strain to glimpse your mercy seat and

others.

“Keep the faith, baby” is the title of a 1967 book of sermons by, and a 2002 film about, Adam Clayton Powell Jr, a Baptist minister who became New York’s first African-American congressman in 1944. A charismatic campaigner and controversial politician, he spoke directly against the attitudes and legislation which disenfranchised Black Americans. Combining church and society made sense.

As I write this the UK is on the verge of taking steps out of the Covid-19 lockdown. For eight weeks and counting, millions of people have restricted themselves to their homes, motivated by a desire to shield the vulnerable, protect the NHS, and save lives. Churches have closed their buildings and carried on sharing the love of God in other ways. People of all faiths and ideologies have made sacrifices as much for the sake of others as for themselves. Perhaps it is not so far off the church at Colossae being told to persevere, motivated by the hope promised to them in the good news of God’s love for the whole world. Keep the faith, baby.

Prayer

God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer you have helped us to keep the faith. When life has been cruel, in times of desolation and heartbreak, when we have been weary and resentful, in places of threat and isolation, when injustice has become routine. Today, whatever we encounter whether joy or ecstasy or terror or boredom help us to keep the faith. Amen

Thursday 24th September [Colossians - Paul's Labours for the Gentiles](#)

The Rev'd Geoffrey Clarke is Moderator of East Midlands Synod and a member of St Andrew's with Castle Gate, Nottingham

Colossians 1: 24 - 29

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Reflection

Paul responds to his sufferings with "rejoicing". He speaks from the reality of enduring persecution – literally imprisonment – as a result of his commitment to Christ. That may not, I suspect, be exactly how many of us feel!

I recall the words on a poster I saw many years ago: "If you were accused of being a disciple of Jesus would there be sufficient evidence to convict you?" In his exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad, 2018) Pope Francis said this: "Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for "those who want to save their life will lose it"

whether we would support a request for confirmation by young people with Down syndrome. He feared some might consider the candidates themselves might not be able, in the minds of the rest of the church membership, to understand the obligations of membership. When asked how the request had come about he told us that they had simply said, "I love Jesus. I want to be a church member". On hearing that the Church Council made its decision very quickly: these candidates not only should be received into membership, they were likely to embody a greater insight into the key reason for confirmation! By contrast, I can recall Holy Communion services in which only a proportion of the congregation received the bread and wine. Their stated reason for not making their communion was invariably, "I'm not good enough". In the church at Colossae there was a similar tendency: to intimidate and unsettle Christian disciples with the threat of disqualification and failing to meet the requirements of the regulations. Paul insists that none should be excluded from the circle of those who are regarded as "in Christ". Rigid enforcement of prescribed festivals and rituals, dietary and piety requirements, particular theology and worship styles, has potential for missing the real point. Perhaps, to be able to say, "I love Jesus" is the place to start ... and to which we should return?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for your gracious acceptance of us – beyond any deserving or qualification on our part. Enable us to be generous in our regard of those whose festivals, food and drink, theology and worship styles differ from our own and grant us the wisdom to regulate our living and loving by what we see revealed in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Wednesday 30th September [Colossians - Life Giving Union with Christ](#)
The Rev'd Terry Hinks, minister of Trinity, High Wycombe and Cores End URC

Colossians 3: 1 - 4

Incarnate, crucified, and living God we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ. Amen

[Tuesday 29th September Colossians - False Asceticism](#)

The Rev'd Geoffrey Clarke is Moderator of East Midlands Synod and a member of St Andrew's with Castle Gate, Nottingham

Colossians 2: 16 - 23

Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

Reflection

Paul mentions "disqualification" (v. 18) and "regulations" (v. 22). Both can have a negative connotation: that we have not done enough, know enough, are good enough to be acceptable to God. (I concede that in our Dissenting genes there is a suspicion of human rules and regulations in the Church setting!)

One of the most memorable of Church Council meetings in my home church – over thirty years ago – was the occasion our minister asked us

(Matthew 16: 25)." He goes on to contrast the persecution we face as a result of steadfast faithfulness with suffering we bring on ourselves: "... we are speaking about inevitable persecution, not the kind of persecution we might bring on ourselves by our mistreatment of others. The saints are not odd and aloof, unbearable because of their vanity, negativity and bitterness." He concludes, "Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness". For Paul it is not all about himself but about Christ: "It is he whom we proclaim". (Colossians 1: 28) Elsewhere (2 Corinthians 12: 9) Paul acknowledges that it is not in his own strength that he can endure suffering but through God's all-sufficient grace. That grace has potential to reach and strengthen us – even in lockdown.

Prayer

God of all grace, enable us to live as those who are worthy of persecution: may we not be odd and aloof or unbearable because of our vanity, negativity and bitterness. Enable our lives more and more to reflect the love of God seen in Jesus. Bless all who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: may they know your strength and help in their suffering. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[Friday 25th September Colossians - Paul's Concern](#)

The Rev'd Dr David Whiting, Minister, Sunderland and Boldon URC Partnership

Colossians 2: 1 - 5

For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with

you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Reflection

As I read this passage, it made me wonder if Paul could have done with 'Zoom' or its equivalents to make contact with his churches, here he refers to those who he has not seen face to face. He could well have done with social media to see the people face to face.

The Colossian Church was not one that he knew personally, neither did he know other churches in the Lycus valley, including Laodicea, but he wants to encourage them, and he writes to them with an attitude of affection. He is seeking to build links with this Christian community that he has not met. The church was made up of Christians converted by Paul's friends and colleagues.

They are to be bound together as a community showing mutual love, and it is in this loving community that they are to gain knowledge of the mystery that is above every mystery, this is God's purpose disclosed in Christ.

Earlier the letter Paul indicated that he was praying and asking that they would be filled with God's knowledge and all spiritual wisdom. Such treasures are hidden in Christ. To be hidden in Christ does not mean that they are hidden from all understanding, but that they are only known through understanding Christ.

Paul remains anxious that they are not misled by those with plausible arguments. They are to be careful of those with rational arguments, which are plausible but unsound.

Paul may not have seen the Colossian Christians face to face, he may not have lived in the generation of 'Zoom' but he is with them in spirit and he is confident in the strength of their faith.

Reflection

This passage on first reading can be somewhat confusing and baffling! It also seems very focused on physical things and the physicality of Christ and its spiritual parallels and one can get a little bogged down in it all. Indeed C.F.D.Mould, in his commentary, suggests 5 different attempts at unravelling this. We also need to have an understanding of the 'mindset' of the Colossians Paul is writing to which is probably more Jewish in background than other communities. Therefore the discussion about circumcision is of more relevance than a more Gentile church. That is not to say the Gentiles are also not included in this passage 'God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses' - it depends where you put the emphasis 'he forgave us all' or 'all our trespasses'. Yet if we get too bogged down we may miss the three essentials: Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection. It echoes the theme of the earlier chapter, 'through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross'. It is this great wonder of our faith that God has chosen to be us, love us so much to die for us and in the empty tomb promise us that peace and justice will prevail. No ruler or authority can ever compete with the selfless love of God in Christ Jesus. They think they have power and indeed many rulers have, do and will continue to do horrific things to their fellow human beings but that is not and never will be the final word.

We are reconciled people and called to be people of reconciliation in our lives. We are in Christ and Christ is in us; may God continue to work in and through us to his glory.

Prayer

Generous God we thank you that in being reconciled to you we find our peace and our 'home'. May we strive to bring peace and reconciliation into our homes, communities and world. We pray for all who, today, will be unjustly treated or killed. May we dare to speak out against injustice.

I give thanks for the still small voice, the urgings of my conscience, and the insights of dreams.

I strive to keep my focus upon God, to remember God's presence beside me, to cheer my heart, lift my spirit, and quieten my fears.

In life, and in death, I am within God. The blessing of life is before me and God invites me to experience, share and celebrate its joy and delights.

Prayer

Protect me God, I trust in you. When it is hard, and when it is easy - trust in God. When I am safe, and when I am unsure - trust in God. When life affirms, and when it denies - trust in God. In life and in death - trust in God. Amen

[Monday 28th September Colossians - Christ alone is head](#)

The Rev'd Hilary Collinson is one of the ministers serving the Tees and Swale Pastorate.

Colossians 2: 9 - 15

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Paul wants to be involved with these Christians he has not met, he wants them to be open to the message that he teaches and which will only thrive in a community drawn together in love.

Prayer

Gracious God, we are part of the Church, existing throughout the world, a few members we know, but many millions we do not. Though we have not seen each other face to face like Paul, let us be filled with concern for each other, in our separate communities, and together may we bound together in love, and may we gain the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

[Saturday 26th September Colossians - Avoid False Teaching](#)

The Rev'd Daniel Harris, Minister with the North Manchester Mission Partnership

Colossians 2: 6-8

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

Reflection

Competing philosophies and alternative spiritualities are ever-present in the cultural milieu. God is at work outside of the walls of the church and we would be wise to take notice. However, far-out yarns and ideologies do exist - be they overt or covert – which threaten the spiritual moorings of the Body of Christ.

History shows one such movement occurred when the political

pendulum first swung in the favour of the church. In 380 CE Christianity was declared the state religion. Persecution ceased and the church grew dramatically over the following century. This growth was fuelled by many people wanting to be on the winning side. However, the discipling tradition of the previous centuries was undermined by an emerging nominal Christianity. (Shelley Weddell, Fruitful Discipleship.)

Today's reading illustrates Christian faith received as a gift which should be nurtured and encouraged to grow. This is the everyday life of a Christian disciple, not just a vocation for the professional religious person. But that growth can be frustrated.

Space does not allow me to critique every narrative that is blowing through the church. I can only remind us that they do exist, and we need to be mindful of them. They may be captivating to the imagination, but they can lead us somewhere else entirely.

Prayer

May we be mindful of the winds that may blow us away from Jesus
But lean our sails into the tailwinds of the Holy Spirit. May we be watchful of the words of Christ coming from unexpected sources but cautious of voices that offer no allegiance to Christ. In his name, Amen.

Sunday 27th September Psalm 16

The Rev'd David Coaker serves with Grays URC in Essex.

1 Protect me, God, I trust in You
I tell You now, 'You are my Lord'.
On You my happiness depends.
Protect me, God, I trust in You.

2 Your people are a chosen race
And I delight in faithful friends,
But pagan ways I will not share.
Protect me, God, I trust in You.

3 Lord God,
You are my food and drink
My work for You is joy indeed,
Glad is the heritage that's mine.
Protect me, God, I trust in You.

4 Thank You, my Lord,
for warning me,
By night and day
You guide my thoughts
With You before me, I stand firm.
Protect me, God, I trust in You.

5 So now I'm glad in heart and soul
For I have found security

Paraphrase of Psalm 16, Michael Saward (born 1932) © Michael Saward/Jubilate Hymns

you can hear v1 here

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47_vIGH3OBO

Reflection

I have no defence but God. In the face of all that life throws at me, I place my trust in God. God is my protector, my sanctuary.

God's ways tend towards goodness, so I strive to follow them. God has my devotion, allegiance and fidelity.

I ask for the strength, courage, and inspiration to truly be a beacon of God's nature, blessing and joy.

I weep for the world, split by violence, fear and selfishness. I weep for myself as I struggle for unity, peace, comfort and equity.

I give thanks that my life is held within God. Whatever life brings, I will trust in God. There is always a silver lining, a lesson to look back on, an opportunity for goodness. A struggle can bring strength. A mistake can bring wisdom. The moment may be overwhelming but time can give perspective.