

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Today we continue exploring Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. Last week we examined some high Christology; the universal implications of who Jesus Christ is. This morning's passage from Colossians is so rich in theology that there is almost a sermon in every verse, so you will be pleased to know that we will focus on verses six and seven so that we can all get home for lunch!

Do you know what a mixed metaphor is? A mixed metaphor combines two or more images that don't seem to make sense, for example:

You've buttered your bread...now lie in it
Burning the midnight oil... at both ends
Robbing Peter... to pay the Piper

In Colossians chapter 2 verses 6-7, Paul mixes several metaphors in order to describe the process of spiritual growth: "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." Live or "walk" in Christ, abounding or "overflowing" in thanksgiving. Here is the enthusiasm of discipleship, the constant movement towards the kingdom. Yet we are also to be rooted like a tree, built up like a secure structure with an established faith.

If all we have is the dynamism of faith without deep roots and foundations, then we have no stability or reliability to our lives. If all we have is roots and foundations without dynamism and change, then we are caught in the morass of traditionalism. With a wonderful mixed metaphor, our passage captures the dynamics of Christian discipleship.

The Christian life must be lived out. It's to go from our head, to our heart, to our hands, and then to our feet. When Paul says, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him," he's reminding his readers that since they received Jesus by faith, so too they must walk by faith in his power. That's the only way to make spiritual progress. The verb indicates continuous action, we are to continue to live in Him. The past event of receiving Christ should be a present reality in our lives. Our conduct must be consistent with his lordship. Our worship should affect our walk and our practice must conform to our principles.

The Colossians had not merely received the doctrines of Christ; they had received Christ Himself. As Christ, he is identified as the Messiah, or "anointed

one,” promised to Adam, Abraham, and Moses and prophesied about by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah. Jesus was his human name given at his birth and means Saviour. Lord indicates that He is supreme and sovereign. He has no rivals and we must bow before his authority.

Paul then says, just as a tree is “rooted,” we are to be grounded in the soil of God’s Word. The tense of the Greek word means, “once and for all having been rooted.” Those who have received Christ are rooted in him. A tree puts down deep roots in order to find nutrition and to provide stability. Likewise, we must go deep with Christ in order to find the fuel we need to flourish, and in order to withstand the storms of life.

It is possible that this image comes from the beautiful picture in Jeremiah 17:8: “He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” When we are rooted in a relationship with Christ, we will have everything we need for life and for godliness as 2 Peter 1:3 declares. Just as a tree cannot thrive without any roots, so too, we cannot grow if we have not been grounded in “his glory and goodness.”

Paul then uses a building metaphor to show that as our foundation is built on Christ, we must continue to add on so that we’re “being built up in him.” Ephesians 2:20 tells us that at conversion we were “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.” A cornerstone was a big stone placed at the intersecting angle, where two walls of a building came together. In biblical times, buildings were often made of cut rock. By uniting two intersecting walls, a cornerstone helped align the whole structure and tie it together. In the same way, as the cornerstone, Jesus holds everything together and provides alignment to our lives.

God doesn’t want us to stop with conversion; instead He longs for us to construct our lives as 1 Corinthians 3:12 says with “gold, silver, and costly stones” instead of using things that don’t last like wood, hay, and straw. In order to be strong, we must build with solid materials. Again, the tense of the verb indicates that the building keeps on going. The Christian life is not meant to be a one or two-story house, but rather a skyscraper that just keeps going up!

The next metaphor is found in the phrase, “established in the faith, just as you were taught” We’re to be students in God’s university so that our faith can be

strengthened, or established. As students, we must be taught the Word of God in order to grow in our faith. Since a disciple should always be learning, we must make sure we are putting ourselves in an environment where we can study and be strengthened on a regular basis. Our home groups are one of the ways that we can find such an environment within the Benefice.

The final metaphor is, “overflowing with thankfulness.” As we receive instruction in biblical truth it should produce inner joy. Perhaps if we don’t feel very thankful today, it’s because we’ve taken our eyes off Jesus and focussed on our own problems. Our living should lead to thanksgiving. Our task is to live surrendered to his authority and to overflow with thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ, who suffered on the cross for us.

This passage from Paul’s letter to the Colossians urges his readers to let their growth in faith continue to flourish in Christ so that their lives overflow with thankfulness. It is not a question of everything happening at the beginning of our journey when we first commit ourselves.

These two verses challenge us to...

Grow downward by being “rooted”

Grow upward by being “built up”

Grow inward so that we can be “strengthened in the faith”

Grow outward as we “overflow with thankfulness”

To grow, and to remain in close fellowship with God, we need constant filling up, feeding and guiding on a daily basis. The Bible, prayer and Communion are gifts provided for us to use, and without taking God up on these gifts our spiritual growth will weaken and become stunted. So as we join together today around the Lord’s Table let us open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit, building us up in faith.

In Jesus name, Amen.