

July 9, 2017 "Almost Heaven"

Morning
Broadcast



Hawfields
Presbyterian
Church

(14th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
(WV Mission Trip)

Colossians 1:9-12

The mission trip to West Virginia is not vacation: it's our common vocation as people of faith.

What's the difference? A vacation is about recreation and renewal. But our vocation is about redemption and righteousness, that is, making right what has been wrong.

With such wanton destruction in several areas due to flooding and a lack of resources, recovery and rebuilding can seem a distant prospect at best in several parts of West Virginia. But in partnership with the *West Virginia Ministry of Advocacy and Workcamps*, we can act in real ways on our vocation as the Church of Jesus Christ.

We should all ask: why not do this at home? Why do we need to travel to another state to do this kind of work? The truth is there is nothing preventing us from doing precisely that. The reason for going is not just the work we do, but the work God can do with us when we take time to leave home and what's familiar and to opened to what God wants to redeem and make right in us.



Colossians 1:9-12

9 ...Since the day we heard about you, we haven't stopped praying for you and asking for you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. **10** We're praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; **11** by being strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; **12** and by giving thanks with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people.

- Everything seems to lead up to v. 12 and the "inheritance." Is our inheritance worth a lifetime price?
- What do you think it means to live a life "worthy of the Lord"? (v.10)
- What do you imagine is the difference between endurance and patience?
- What kind of fruit do you think God wants your life producing? Are you?

Reflection on Colossians by Alan Brehm

<http://thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com/2010/07/nothing-special-col.html>

...As a minister, it has been my passion to make a lasting contribution to the body of Christ. It was fairly easy to see myself doing that as a professor of the largest theological seminary in the world (at that time). These days, I struggle



sometimes with that notion that I'm supposed to do something spectacular. I think this serves as a kind of follow up to the "myth" that "I can't really make a difference." In a sense, it's the flip side of that idea—that you have to do something "spectacular" if you want to make a difference. I think this is especially the case in our culture where we worship

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

“My evangelical students are much more likely to talk about “trying to follow God’s will for their lives.” While that may sound similar to the concept of vocation as God’s call, it actually puts all of the emphasis on our efforts to discern and almost none at all on God’s actual call. Vocation...involves more than occupation and more than human response.”

–Jill Pelaez Baumgaertner

“celebrities.” How many of our kids dream not of becoming a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher—but rather a famous actor or musician? For some people, that notion becomes almost an obsession—you have to do

something spectacular if you even want to be valued by those you love.

I think that our lesson from Paul’s letter to the Colossians this week gives us some help at this point. He talks about a perspective on the Christian life that is pretty down to earth. It’s a matter of “bearing fruit” and doing “good deeds” and living with “perseverance” and “patience.” These and other incredibly mundane activities are what it means to “walk worthily” of the one who redeemed us. It sounds like the life that Paul envisions for those of us who would follow Christ is really nothing special. That might seem too cliché to merit our attention, until you think about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. After all, what did the Samaritan do that was so “spectacular”? All this kind soul did was to notice the one who was wounded, and then to care enough to bind up the wounds and to provide for his recuperation. It was simply a story of mercy in action, compassion that goes the second mile. But it made all the difference in the world to “the one who fell among thieves.”

It seems to me, contrary to our culture that is obsessed with all things “spectacular,” that it is when we are engaged in the most mundane activities that we make the most difference in another person’s life. When you get right down to it, that’s the only place we can really make much of a difference in the life of another human being. We mortals rarely achieve the level of influence that can truly make a difference for hundreds or thousands of people out there. For the most part, we have the opportunity to touch a life here, a life there. It is through the quality of our character, not anything “spectacular” that we may do, that we make a difference in another life. It is through the way in which we conduct our relationships, not through any great “achievement,” that we really have an effect on another human being. From that perspective, the Christian life is “nothing special”—it’s a matter of simply living out the grace and mercy and compassion of God. But then that’s what makes it so important for us to live like that.

Commentary on Colossians (1:1-14) by Brian J. Walsh

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2924)

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...Let me suggest a hermeneutical principle: Always read the New Testament with Old Testament eyes. Or to shift the metaphor, always hear the New Testament with the ears of Hebrew scripture....

“So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times.”

—Ephesians 5:15-16

So as we begin to read this passage from Colossians what Old Testament allusions or echoes might we immediately begin to notice? And how might attending to those

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



**“Good words will
not do without
good works.”
–Matthew Henry**

connections deepen our reading and our preaching?

Let’s begin with the metaphor of ‘fruit.’ Paul employs the metaphor three times in the span of four verses. “Just as [the gospel] is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves ...” (Colossians 1:6). And then he prays that the community would “lead lives fully worthy of the Lord ... as you bear fruit in every good work ...” (Colossians 1:10). Isn’t it lovely that our reading from Deuteronomy today employs the same metaphor? Torah

obedience, the text assures, “will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil” (Deuteronomy 30:9).

... Might it be that when Paul, a Jew deeply embedded in the narrative and symbolism of the Hebrew scriptures, employs a metaphor like “fruit” there is a whole wealth of allusion to be unpacked? In the biblical imagination fruitfulness is always connected to faithfulness while disobedience and idolatry invariably results in fruitlessness. But what is this fruitfulness that we are talking about? Evoking a covenantal shalom that permeates all of life, our reading from Deuteronomy refers to the fruitfulness of our bodies, our livestock, our soil. This is a familial, procreative, agricultural, and ecological fruitfulness.

And perhaps, just perhaps, this language of fruitfulness goes all the way back to the beginning of the story. Creation is invited to “be fruitful and multiply” in Genesis. And the first word spoken to humanity, indeed,

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

“We are no longer imprisoned in darkness. We now experience the liberating effect of forgiveness as well as understand and enact God's will through our conduct.”

—Richard Carlson

the primal blessing is, “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it ...” (Genesis 1:28). This isn’t the place to engage in the ecological debate about whether this is license to a death-dealing domination of the world (it isn’t), but it is clear that for Paul, when the gospel is proclaimed it brings life, not death. Indeed, when people grow in gospel wisdom and understanding they lead lives worthy of Jesus, lives that bear fruit in every good work.

The creative word that calls forth a world and a people of

fruitfulness is spoken anew in the gospel and, lo and behold, it bears fruit. The fruit of a new humanity who themselves bear the fruit of good work in every dimension of life, every nook and cranny of our culture. If the preacher was thinking of expanding on what that might look like, she would need look no further than today’s gospel reading.

The preacher is also wise to notice the proximity of this gospel, this fruit-bearing word. This is a word, says our Deuteronomy reading, that is not far away, but rather, “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your hearts for you to observe” (Deuteronomy 30:14). And so the apostle says that the gospel is also not far away. It is not something that you need to go looking for. Rather, in almost personalizing language, it “has come to you” (Colossians 1:6). The gospel has sought us out. Perhaps we need to consider how our preaching is called to be a ministry of such proximity, wherein the word is near and the gospel comes to bear rich fruit in our lives.

Paul's prayer for the community mirrors the purpose of his letter. He prays that they "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" (Colossians 1:9-10). That is also Paul's agenda in this epistle. It is, if you will, a catechetical text. An

deeply in the story of Jesus understood through the narrative of Israel. Without growing in such knowledge, without being more deeply shaped by this story, the community will be barren, devoid of good fruit. No wonder the psalmist this week prays, "Lead me in your truth, and teach me" (Psalm 25:5).

Again, Paul evokes the story of Israel in the language that he uses. Employing metaphors of



epistle for deepening knowledge, wisdom and understanding. But the goal is not to acquire abstract theological information. No, this is a transformative knowing, rooting this young Gentile Christian community ever more

covenant and election, he calls his listeners to give "thanks to the Father, who has enabled [or 'called'] you to share the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Colossians 1:12).

Additional Thoughts

- Sometimes we have to go away to remember to be Christians where we are.
- **18** This is the one good thing I've seen: it's appropriate for people to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work under the sun during the brief lifetime that God gives them because that's their lot in life.
19 Also, whenever God gives people wealth and riches and enables them to enjoy it, to accept their place in the world and to find pleasure in their hard work—all this is God's gift.
20 Indeed, people shouldn't brood too much over the days of their lives because God gives an answer in their hearts' joy. –

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

- What has stopped you from going on a mission trip? (OR what has spurred you into going?)
- How is God a part of your everyday job or work?
- What do you endure in your life for the sake of Christ?