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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12C)

July 24, 2016

Text: Colossians 2:6–19

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians has received our attention over these past couple of weeks. Two weeks ago – when we began this sermon series – I introduced you to a heresy that was beginning to cause problems among the Colossian Christians. The heresy is called Gnosticism. It basically teaches that the physical world is evil including our own physical bodies. Salvation, for the Gnostics, means being released from the limitations of the physical world which can only happen when apprehends a mysterious, secret form of knowledge.

According to the Gnostics, Jesus isn't the eternal Son of God who became flesh and blood to save the world. Why would a spiritual being do that? The physical world is evil. Instead, Jesus was a lesser deity that got trapped in this physical world. But He escaped the trap of this evil world by apprehending this secret knowledge. Having won release from the limitations of the physical world, Jesus now He wants to share that secret knowledge with the select few who can receive it.

Today's reading from Colossians 2:6–19 exposes this heresy for what it is: false, evil, and destructive to one's eternal wellbeing. The apostle Paul will not leave the Colossian Christians in doubt as to who the Lord Jesus is and what He did to save them (us, and all Christians) from becoming "captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world" (vs. 8). It's either freedom or captivity. Freedom in the Christ of the Biblical Gospel or captivity in the empty deceits of human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world.

Paul begins with an exhortation that reminds those early Christians of the powerful apostolic witness to the Gospel. Vs. 6–7, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." Remain in the Christ Jesus who was preached to you according to the purity of Holy Scriptures, not the false teaching of the Gnostics and their human traditions and captivity to the fallen, elemental spirits of

this world. Don't be taken captive! Their false teaching has the ring of wisdom but it is deceptive and hollow. Remain rooted in Christ, walking in His love, grace, and saving truth.

In this Lord Jesus, whom the Church receives, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (vs. 9). Jesus is no lesser deity liberated from the evils of the physical world by a secret, esoteric knowledge. Far from it! Jesus is the fullness of deity in the fullest extent. All that God is, Jesus is. He possesses all divine attributes, qualities, and characteristics for He is the fullness of God. The Nicene Creed declares that Jesus is “God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...” To know God in truth means knowing Jesus. Or to put it differently, there can be no true, saving knowledge of God outside of Jesus. For there is no other God than the one who Jesus is! He is the Son of the Father from whom proceeds the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

But here's the surprising miracle of the Gospel. In Jesus, the fullness of deity dwells *bodily*.” The fullness of God dwells in that body which was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. In that body who healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave the sinful, and restored hope to the lost, dwelt the fullness of God. In that body which suffered and died on the cross, dwelt God's absolute and complete fullness. That is why we can rightly say that in Christ Jesus, God died on the cross. In the body of Jesus, God rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father's throne, and will return again in glory on the Last Day. In the Holy Supper, we receive the true body and true blood of the fullness of deity. Paul, in Acts 20:28, describes the Church as God's precious sheep obtained by God's own blood. The blood of Jesus is God's blood for in Him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

As amazing as that truth is – the fullness of God dwells bodily in Jesus – there is something more which changes everything for us. I'd like to read vs. 9 and 10 together. Get ready for the surprise of eternity!! “For in him (Jesus) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” You and every baptized believer is filled to the full with Jesus, the same Jesus in whom the fullness of deity dwells.

The Gnostic heresy, by contrast, is empty deceit (vs. 8). The difference between that false teaching and the truth couldn't be more clear. One is emptiness giving only captivity. The other is fullness giving freedom and eternal life and vitality. Each and every one of you baptized believers is filled with the fullness of Jesus. You are

complete and perfect in His eternal life. The salvation promised to you is not some half-baked promise. Heaven forbid! All that God is, He gives to you. All His love, grace, wisdom, knowledge, insight, power, and glory are yours. By the will of the Father and in the grace of the Holy Spirit, you are filled with the Father's Son, the Lord Jesus, in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

This fullness of salvation found in Christ Jesus was brought to you in a simple way, one that is open to anyone who would receive it. Contrary to what the Gnostics were teaching, the fullness of life in Christ is open to every man, woman, and child. It's described in vs. 11–12. Please follow along and rejoice in this great gift. "In him (Jesus, in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him (Jesus) in baptism, in which you were also raised with him (Jesus) through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Baptism is the means by which all believers are brought into participation with the fullness of divine life in Christ. It's the true circumcision that delivers every Christian from the dominion of our fallen, sinful natures which do not want to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come. In the waters of baptism, we were mysteriously and wondrously buried with Jesus. As Jesus died on the cross, so we died in our baptism. As Jesus rose again from the dead on the third day, so we also are "raised with him through faith." Death and evil no longer have dominion over us. We are baptized into Christ Jesus. We are alive with him. We are filled with His fullness that can never be emptied or diminished.

Luke & Lindsey, we didn't plan this. But you couldn't have picked a better day for your beautiful daughter to be baptized. Rejoice this day knowing that she was buried with Christ. More than that, she is raised with Him to walk in the fullness of His divine, resurrection life forever. She is not only your daughter but a child of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This gift of baptism, which we received at a specific time and place, continues to give Christ's fullness day after day. Through your baptism, you daily receive Jesus and continue to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith (vs. 7). We never set aside our baptism. It always remains with us, moment by moment. Martin Luther, the Large Catechism, states it this way, "Therefore, let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. Every day

they should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new” (LC IV 84). Baptism give you a new life that is to be lived in constantly.

That is the great gift we receive: new life. Before our baptism, there was only spiritual death and condemnation. But the Lord Jesus did something to change all that. What He did, is given to us in baptism. As baptized believers filled with the fullness of Jesus, listen to what He did that we might receive all His blessed gifts:

¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

The victory Jesus won in His physical, bodily death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, is given to you and all baptized believers. Once you were dead in trespasses. But now you are alive in Christ. All sins are forgiven. The record of debt that rightly stood against you was nailed to Jesus’ cross. His blood washed it clean. Before God the Father, you stand pure and clean and righteous, complete and whole. And all the powers of sin, death, and the devil, which stood against you, were utterly defeated and put to shame by Jesus on Good Friday and Easter.

This is the Jesus of the Biblical Gospel. In Him, dwells the fullness of deity bodily. That fullness went to the cross and grave so that you live full and complete in Him unto eternal life. “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (vs. 6 – 7).

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.