

Scripture Col 1: 1-14 (NRSVUE)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **4** for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, **5** 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 **6** 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. **7** This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, **8** and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

9 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, **10** so that you may walk 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. **11** May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, so that you may have all endurance and patience, joyfully **12** giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. **13** He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Are we ready to invite in a whole new understanding of what it means to live?

Taking the leap. That's the journey of prayer

I don't know about you.....but I'm ready. I'm so ready. I've been on a path to get ready for a long time, and that path is picking up speed, becoming more urgent, more convincing. Our understanding of what it means to live, to be human, that all of us have known so far is becoming increasingly faulty, and I can feel it.... the need to make an evolutionary leap. Are you ready to leap with me?

Humans throughout recorded history have been disappointed in the project of being human and so many truth-tellers along the way. Buddha pointed out the issue over 2,500 years ago very clearly, declaring that life, as we understand and live it, is suffering. In our understanding, perhaps...

- It's for the birds.
- It's full of violence and pain.

When Jesus came some 500 years after that in a different part of the world, he showed us a way to live. A way of peace, forgiveness, and love. He also showed us that a radically different way to live on this planet was possible, not only possible but at the heart of our human destiny.

And there have been so many others. So many other lights along the way: Prophets. Teachers. Saints. Gurus. Poets. Leaders. Radicals. There have been so many who have carried this light, expressed this beautiful and terrible truth, that the way we humans tend to live, typically, is deeply limited and the source of great pain and suffering AND that there is a different way. That underneath all this distress of separation and fear, there is love, unity, and peace that has the power to change everything.

How do we achieve this way of Jesus? Well, if we journey in prayer, that is taking prayer on our journey, we will discover the thread that the Spirit brings to our lives. And there is all kinds of prayer opportunities...getting up in the morning, praying before going to sleep at night or before important occasions, when we hear of another's experiences, or even our own.

Unfortunately, because the majority of us have stayed buried under the weight of separation, these lights have mostly gathered followers instead of igniting real transformation.

- Many worship Jesus instead of believing it possible that they too could be transformed by love in the same way that he was.
- Many meditate like Buddha instead of believing that they too could be free of suffering.

And these followers set up rules and identities and practices that then keep them separate from followers of other lights creating a scene where although the body of humans truly looking for and believing that there may be a better way, that there may be a unity and peace beyond our human separation, remain separated from each other.

Paul, one of the lights I speak of, calls us to be ready to be made new and clear, deeply clear that this newness will not be found outside of ourselves but within the fire, the love, and the presence of our own heart. This is where the new church is being formed. It is being received as an influx from the spiritual realm. The new church makes its way inside, behind, and beyond the security of seeking machinations of our brains. It has been my experience that it is only in turning our attention away from these machinations that we will be able to receive a new life.

And as that new life enters in it will reveal the failure of our minds' programming, and slowly, often with difficulty and pain, we will be empowered to see the separation stories that we have been complicit in,

that have caused our suffering, and finally.....letting that go.....revealing in time what was there all along. A life worth living is what Paul calls us to express gratitude for the faith, love, and fruitfulness of the Colossian Christians, highlighting the power of Christ's redemption and reconciliation in bringing believers into a relationship with God.

Imagine being a believer of that community receiving this letter from Paul. Think about the encouragement and reassurance you might feel knowing that Christ is above all powers and authorities, perhaps giving you strength and confidence in your faith. Paul's words serve as a reminder to focus on the Jesus-way and to not be swayed by worldly influences or teachings. Paul's message is a powerful reminder to prioritize our relationship with Jesus' example to continually grow in our faith and love for others. Through these teachings, we are reminded of the importance of staying grounded in our beliefs and allowing them to influence every aspect of our lives. This verse challenged to reflect on where we place our trust and to work towards deepening our understanding of God's love in our lives encouraging us to center our hearts and minds on the Jesus-way and allow His love and teachings to guide us in all that we do.

How do we do that?

We do that expressing gratitude (you heard this from Rev. Kathy Henry in her sermon last week, "Gratitude with Attitude"), offering prayers for the believers, and affirming the supremacy of Christ. Today's passage lays the foundation for Paul's entire letter, emphasizing key themes of faith, love, and the life-changing impact of the gospel. Paul's opening statement as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" immediately establishes his authority and underscores the divine origin of his message.

Paul's expression of gratitude and his mention of continual prayer for the Colossian believers emphasize the importance of thankfulness and intercessory prayer for their community. The connection between faith, love, and the eternal hope stored up in heaven reminds us of the

inseparable link between their beliefs, actions, and the ultimate promise of prayer. The call to “bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” (v.10) underscores our ongoing process for spiritual growth and the impact it has on our lives.

The truth is, as far as I can see, humans have been seeking after altered states of consciousness, some through prayer for centuries. Perhaps it’s worth wondering a bit about this part of our human experience. The truth is, as far as I have experienced it, the “normal” state of consciousness most of us are born into, often stinks. Buddha called it suffering. Jesus called it sin. Today we might call it mental illness, and we all seem to be afflicted. Why wouldn’t we seek...

- ways to escape
- ways to allay suffering
- ways to feel better on the inside

Today many of us are altering our state of consciousness through a daily pill, or two or three, prescribed to us by a mental health professional. Of course, many are doing this for good and right health reasons. I’m intrigued by the growing number of psychedelic therapies being developed and have friends who have made the journey to different places and enter into an entirely different state of consciousness for a time. Yet, I find solace in quiet meditation and prayer, which gives the freedom of taking time out of reality, to see the journey from a spiritual perspective

Freedom it seems to me, is what all of this seeking is actually about. A freedom to feel good on the inside, to feel accepted as we are, at peace, at one with life, with ourselves and with others. The freedom of the holy city.

Our “normal” state of consciousness rarely allows this freedom. It is much too busy judging, fearing, comparing and competing. While we like to judge each other’s methods (which is its own kind of method for feeling good), I

truly believe that the journey of prayer is the clearest way to gain focus for our lives and our spirituality.

The invitation of the holy city, of the spiritual life, is to surround our “normal” consciousness with a more expanded awareness grounded in acceptance, presence, and love. Of course, we can taste expanded awareness through our mind and body. These tastes can help us to see what is possible when we release the limits we, and our social conditioning, place upon us when we allow our spiritual selves to participate in the journey.

I feel deeply called to create spaces of community where we can practice offering presence, acceptance, and love to each other. Where we can speak freely about how we are going about the work of “feeling good”...

- what is helping
- what is hurting
- what we feel called to release
- what we feel called to explore

I believe the call of the new church, as Paul says to us in today’s scripture, is to be this kind of spiritual community, where we own the fullness of who we are, what we are choosing, how we live. It seems to me if we can create spaces where we truly can love each other as we are, and be fully who we are, then our need for prayer will necessarily increase.

There are many gates into the holy city, many paths to the Holy One, and each of us is stumbling along doing the best that we can. Demonizing each other’s paths, each other’s choices, and each other’s experiences can only create division and disconnection. Let us honor each other’s efforts to feel good in a world that often thrives on our feeling bad and let us have compassion for each other’s experiences by embarking on a journey of prayer. It’s time to recognize the sacred call in every moment. God sees what we are up to and loves us still. We can do the same, knowing that God is with on that journey of prayer. Amen!