

## Scripture

## Col 2: 6-19 (NRSVUE)

<sup>6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

<sup>8</sup> Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by the removal of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food or drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. <sup>17</sup> These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, initiatory visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with a growth that is from God.

## Sermon

*“Coming Alive, Rooted in Christ”* Pastor Bob

In a recent article written for Inside Higher Ed, I came across a story entitled, **How One College Aims to Help Students Fail Better**

The writer, Ashley Mowreader, highlighted a campaign at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY (close to my hometown of Syracuse), to encourage failing better as a response to the needs of today’s students. According to the school, “Research shows that Gen Z learners are more likely than previous groups of college students to experience anxiety and existential dread.” The addition of artificial intelligence tools adds another layer of challenge and uncertainty to students’ lives.

“Rather than viewing struggles with attention spans or technology disruptions as failure, we want to reframe these as natural learning adaptations that require support and guidance,” according to one professor. The campaign, launching this fall, will create mindful interventions to encourage students to take risks and learn from failure. For example, in academic advising, students may need encouragement to take a challenging course and view it as a meaningful risk.

The University of Phoenix’s College of General Studies enrolls primarily non-traditional students; the average attendee is a 38-year-old parent who works full-time. Administrators wanted to see if adding a health and wellness course between the two would improve passing rates for subsequent courses.

“We hypothesized that by moving an existing high-performing science course to the second course in undergraduate student schedules, we could significantly improve second course pass rates and maintain or slightly improve progression and pass rates for the two courses that followed,” according to the white paper.

But because students were taking the course later in their academic career, after they might have already needed help, researchers theorized the intervention was less impactful on outcomes than if delivered earlier.

That describes a lot of people may know in the Jesus-way, who may be rescued only to see them jump into the same ditch further down the road. In one of the comments, a writer on the subject, Tim Walker, wrote, “Me and Jesus on a regular basis!” Perhaps, you could say the same thing. Jesus rescues you from one problem only to see you jump headfirst into the same problem, or another one, down the road.

Thankfully, the Jesus-way gives us these moments of failure so that we learn that we can live in a new way, rooted in Christ, where you can discover how to stay out of those “ditch-making” moments.

**Colossians 2:6-7** tells us, “<sup>6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

We all can and do receive Christ by faith. Keep on living the same way—by faith. Literally, “continue walking around” the same way you started your journey with Christ—by faith. If you want to stay out of the ditches in life live in grateful dependence upon Christ from the beginning to the end of your life with Him.

You have been rooted in Christ (vs.7)—an agricultural term. You are this minute being built up in Christ—an architectural term And as a result, you are being established, or strengthened, in the faith. You see, when the Jesus-way is the root and foundation of your life, then you become strong through your dependence on Him. Not only that, but you also overflow with thankfulness.

So, from beginning to end, live in grateful dependence upon Christ, not in your own efforts. Walk around every day, strengthened by your faith in Christ.

In his book, **Faith That Endures**, Ronald Boyd-MacMillan tells the story of a number of conversations he has had with Wang Mingdao, one of China's most famous pastors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first time he met this famous—and persecuted—Chinese pastor, the pastor asked him, “Young man, how do you walk with God?”

The author lists off a set of disciplines such as Bible study and prayer, to which the Chinese pastor retorted, “Wrong answer. To walk with God, you must go at walking pace.”

When you do a hundred things FOR Jesus, trying to please Him, that’s when you run headlong into a ditch. Instead, slow down a little and just walk WITH Jesus. He’ll keep you out of the ditches. If our best living life is daily depending on Christ, then we can stay away from the notion of frantically depending on ourselves alone.

**Colossians 2:8** tells us, “<sup>8</sup> Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

The “elemental principles of the world” are a reference to the angels and planets that teachers in ancient Greece said influenced people’s lives. It was a form of Greek philosophy mixed with ancient astrology that false teachers used to control people. But Paul says don’t live your life by the stars, and don’t live your life by their human traditions. Instead, live your life in dependence upon Jesus.

David Neff, former editor-in-chief of Christianity Today, once talked about receiving a promotional Email from L. L. Bean. The subject line said, “Double Coupon Dollars: Our Gift to You.”

Neff said, “The old sales trick worked. The promise of something free compelled me to open the e-mail. But the first words I read from the e-mail itself gave me a different message: ‘EARN Double Coupon Dollars.’ Wait,” Neff said. “Didn’t the subject line say it was a gift? Now they want me to ‘EARN’ their gift?” ([www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

I’m afraid that’s the way some operate. They SAY that coming alive is God’s free gift, but when we get involved, we find that there are a lot of things we have to do that are risky and might not work the way we perceived. Maybe we have to give up something or do any number of things that come from human tradition and not necessarily scripture. And often failure is (and should) be an acceptable part of the journey to know how to be fully alive, abounding with and rooted in Christ, with all the successes AND failures that will be a part of the journey.

Our journey is about learning how to find our potential in the Jesus-way, knowing we will have guidance, grace, and grit. Let us be blessed in that way, taking risks, and rooted in the Jesus-way Amen!