**July 24, 2022 Colossians 2:6-15**

***Stay the Course***

**Scripture: *Colossians 2:6-15 NRSV***

*(6)As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, (7)rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (8)See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (9)For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10)and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. (11)In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; (12)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. (13)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, (14)erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. (15)He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it*.

**Notes:**

1. Modern culture tells us the ***faith*** of our fathers was not right.
   1. Don’t be ***confused*** by propaganda of extremists.
   2. Pop culture want us to ***waiver*** in our faith.
2. Which way do we ***turn***, what should we do?
   1. Stay the ***course***.
   2. Do not let anybody convince you that your faith is ***wrong***.
3. One of the greatest heresies of our day is ***Secular*** ***Humanism***.
   1. Humanism suggests that we need not rely on any ***power*** greater than ourselves.
   2. Humanists fail to mention that Genesis goes on to describe our ***sinful*** ***nature***.
   3. ***Feast*** on the riches of Christ and his kingdom.
4. Circumcision was the ***sign*** and ***seal*** of the covenant for Jews.
   1. Baptism is for us what ***circumcision*** was for the Jews.
   2. Baptism is ***dying*** and ***rising*** with Christ each day
   3. Baptism is a living ***symbol*** that Christ died for the forgiveness of your sins
5. It’s ***seldom*** easy to know whether to stay or to cut bait.
   1. There are no ***guarantees***
   2. The big decisions are ***seldom*** clear cut;
6. When is it best to stay the ***course***?
   1. Seek God’s will, then act ***boldly***.
   2. ***Don’t*** look back.
   3. Stay the ***course***.
7. We are given everything we need to make sound ***judgments***.
   1. ***Read*** His words.
   2. Prayer; ***pray*** to the Lord with your requests.
   3. ***Trust*** that the way he leads you.

**Script:**

Have you ever been lost? Have you ever been someplace that looks totally unfamiliar; a place you have never been before, a place where you don’t know which way to turn or which direction to head? Well I am not ashamed to say that in my life I have been there many times. I remember once Jan and I was on the motorcycle and my GPS lost its connection and I was lost, I didn’t know which way to turn, nor which route I was heading to; I only knew that when I started out I was on my way to a specific destination and somewhere along the way I had lost my way; I didn’t know where the road I was on would take me; all I knew was where I wanted to end up. I could have stayed on the road I was on when I started, but I started to doubt and fear; so I would take turns that seemed like the right way but weren’t. I eventually ended up where I needed to be, but along the way I traveled on many roads that took me places I didn’t want to be, and it took me a lot longer than I expected because I was not on the right path.

Perhaps you have had similar experiences, times where you lost your way and traveled down the wrong road, you may have experiences that you are not proud of, maybe even ashamed to share with others, but here you are today, in this church, in the presence of many others who may have completely different experiences but one thing in common; we know where we want to go, we just may not be sure how to get there.

Our passage today is found in a section of Paul’s letter to the Colossians. In Chapter 2 Paull is teaching the Colossians that once you start down the road to a destination, we need to stay the course. He is teaching us not to give in to temptation and fear and false promises. Stick with what you know and trust the Lord to lead the way. This is what is at the hear of what Paul is saying to the Colossians. Stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage today, Colossians 2:6-15.

*Colossians 2:6-15 NRSV (6)As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, (7)rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (8)See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (9)For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10)and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. (11)In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; (12)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. (13)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, (14)erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. (15)He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it*.

The church we know as the Colossians were mostly gentile believers. Their congregation did not grow up learning all of the customs, traditions, and history of the Jewish people. To many of these people the practices of the Jewish people may have seemed odd and peculiar. They weren’t steeped in the Torah and Jewish way of life. All that they knew was Jesus Christ and what they had been taught about his teachings and his example.

Paul’s letter came before the times of creeds and doctrines of faith that we are privileged to. The Colossians did not have a Book of Order, a Book of Confession, nor did they have a church manual to explain the beliefs of the church. So, Paul encourages them to simply live by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul tells them to “…*continue to live your lives in him.”*  The problem is there is a lot of wiggle room in these directions; a lot of places where the direction is left to your discretion and interpretation. This is where the trouble begins.

Modern culture would have us believe that the faith of our fathers was not right. Modern culture tries to twist scripture and Jesus' every word to convince us that many things that are changing in our culture; many things that are changing in this world which are counter to what we believe are the transformation and the enlightenment of mankind to better understand God and the meanings of his words. Modern culture would like us to believe that it is better to abort a viable fetus, than to have that child born into a world that does not want it. Modern culture would have us to believe that same sex marriage is acceptable, that it was somehow in God’s plan that two people of the same sex are able to live together in harmony. Modern culture would have us to believe that you are free to love whomever you wish, and that monogamy (the commitment to stay morally and sexually committed to one spouse) is outdated.

We watch the protests on the news of people offended by the court striking down the Roe vs. Wade decision and they would have you believe that we who live by the laws of God, are the ones who are truly infringing our beliefs upon them; when in reality they are striving to infringe their sinfulness upon the church and those of faith; striving to force those of us with differing views to accept their sinful beliefs and say that it is okay for them to do what they do. Today I am here to tell you that a sin is a sin. Whether you are gossiping about the people engaging in a sexual affair out of wedlock, or the man and woman having an illicit affair outside of their marriage. Whether you say it is ok for two people of the same sex to engage in a sexual relationship, or you say it is ok for a woman to say that since it is her body it is therefore her choice to carry a child to term or to abort.

Do not be confused by the propaganda of today's media as well as the far left and far right political extremists. You will find that both sides of this political firestorm will use those in the middle as pawns in their war to get what they want. They spread lies (oh we know this as misinformation), spreading lies in order to begin conspiracy theories and create separation between those of us in the middle. Why do they do this, to create turmoil and separate us into factions. We saw this first hand in the aftermath of the shootings on route 30 involving Black Lives Matter protestors. To this day we have seen no concrete evidence of any of the conspiracy theories surrounding the election results of 2020 and the source of the Covid Virus. These people want nothing more than to create turmoil and confusion. They want you and me to doubt our belief system and maybe even waiver in our faith. They want us to accept their sinful ways and even tell them it is okay to believe the way they do.

So which way do we turn, what should we do? Growing up I only ever heard of 5 or 6 major denominations of the Christian faith. I knew of the church of the Nazarene, but I am not sure how many of my friends at school did. I knew of the Church of God, the Assembly of God, the United Methodist, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans and the Catholics; because I had relatives who attended these different denominations but when I was younger, I could not see a difference in their beliefs. They all believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they all believed in one God, the father, and the Holy Spirit. As I got older I realized that what separated them were the interpretations of scholars in how we are to follow God and what it takes to be saved from sin and living a life of salvation. But as these new cultural changes begin to infiltrate our churches, we begin to see larger differences in what the denomination wants us to believe and what we feel is right.

Again I ask, which way do we turn, what should we do? Paul tells us to stay the course. The mainstream protestant denominations have served us well. They are rooted in scripture and focused clearly on the Lordship of Christ. Stick with what you know and trust the Lord to lead the way. Paul tells us in verse 8, “*(8)See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.*”

In other words do not let anybody convince you that your faith is wrong. Do not let anybody convince you that sin is acceptable. This was a problem for the Colossians, Gnosticism would have them believe that there was a secret knowledge that was available for a select few. Gnosis means knowledge, and Gnosticism was a complex belief system based on secrets. But Gnosticism was one of many false teachings the Colossians were exposed to. They all had one thing in common; they wanted the Colossians to follow a different teaching than what was presented to them from Jesus.

One of the greatest heresies of our day is Secular Humanism. Humanists believe that we have within us all that we need to be happy and complete, that it’s just a matter of thinking positively and developing your own God-given potential. The roots of Humanism go back to the Renaissance and the rediscovery of Greek and Roman literature, art and culture. Coming out of the Dark Ages, Humanism was like a breath of fresh air, awakening the human spirit. Humanism in our day goes much farther. It suggests that we have within us such innate goodness and potential that we need not rely on any power greater than ourselves.

Ironically, today’s Humanists start with the Bible. They point out how God created us in his image, looked at what he had created and said, “…behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) What Humanists fail to mention is that Genesis goes on to describe our sinful nature and how we are often rebellious and defiant and unwilling to submit to the authority of God. (Genesis 3) Humanists are idealists. They believe that, given a choice, we’ll choose what is right and fair and just and in the best interests of all concerned. History paints a different picture. Throughout history, people like us have proven to be selfish and greedy, conniving and downright mean, taking advantage of others every chance they get. Thanks to the influence of Humanism, we’re now living in a day of moral relativism:

* “If it feels good, do it.”
* If you want something bad enough, go for it. “You deserve a break today.”
* Never mind what God would have you do, do your own thing. “Be all that you can be.” “Have it your own way.”

Humanism is a half-truth – and those are the worst kind: Yes, we’re created in the image of God and have the potential for good; at the same time, we’re also sinful and have the potential for evil. No one knew this better than Paul, who told the Romans in chapter 7, *“… (15)I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. … (19)For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. … (22)For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, (23)but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (24)Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (25)Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*” (Romans 7:14-25)

I have read of a story of an old Cherokee who told his grandson about a fight that goes on inside of him. He said it was a fight between two wolves. One was evil: anger, greed, arrogance, self-pity, gossip, resentment, and false pride. The other was good: Joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather, ‘Which wolf do you think will win?’ The old Cherokee replied, ‘The one I feed.'” (Two Wolves, Anonymous)

Paul would have us feast on the riches of Christ and his kingdom. He reminds the Colossians that the fullness of God can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing else comes close. He writes, “*(9)For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10)and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.*”

He ends this portion of the letter by talking about circumcision and baptism. Here’s the gist of it all: Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant for the Jews. It meant you belonged to the people of God and that God was on your side. Baptism became the sign and seal of the new covenant established by Jesus Christ. Baptism is for us what circumcision was for the Jews. Except that it’s more than a sign; it’s a way of life. Paul writes, “(3)Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4)Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. Romans 6:3-4 NRSV”

Baptism is a living sacrament – not simply getting sprinkled or immersed at some point in your life, but dying and rising with Christ each day – getting yourself out of the center of the circle and putting Christ first, serving the needs of others, to the glory of God. Baptism is a living symbol of the Atonement – that Christ died for the forgiveness of your sins in order that you might be free to follow him in faithful obedience.

When it comes to the big decisions in life, it’s seldom easy to know whether to stay the course or to cut bait. There are those who stand at a crossroads and must decide which direction to go. And there are no guarantees that if you choose one direction over another it will result in better things. Families have agonized over life and death decisions; whether or not to keep our loved one on life support. Business owners doing everything possible to keep their business afloat only to watch their life’s savings and life’s work dwindle away. Those who have struggled to keep their marriage together, only to drift further and further apart. The big decisions are seldom clear cut; as Lucy told Charlie Brown, “In the book of life, the answers are not in the back of the book.”

When is it best to stay the course? When is it time to cut your losses and chart a new course? It’s a judgment call. With this in mind here are three words to the wise. First, seek God’s will, then act boldly. Indecision, going back and forth, straddling the fence will only aggravate the problem. Let Paul’s words to Timothy inspire you: “…*for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 NRSV*” Seek God’s will, then act boldly.

Next, once you make a decision, don’t look back. Second guessing is a form of self-punishment. Thinking that if you had given it more time; or if you could have a chance to do it over again you would do it differently. Truth be told, in the same situation, you would probably do it the exact same way. In the game of life, you seldom get do-overs. Don’t look back; instead resolve to move forward. Remember what we talked about the other week, *“…No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God Luke 9:62*.”

Finally, act boldly, don’t look back, then stay the course. Whether you set out in a new direction or you have decided to stick with the one you’ve got, stay on that course long enough for God to lead you where he would have you to go. Expect to encounter a certain amount of struggle and discouragement, in whatever direction you take. Remember what Jesus told his disciples about the coming days of trials and tribulations: “*But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:13 NRSV*”

We have been given everything we need to make good sound judgments. We have the love and direction of our Lord Jesus Christ. Read His words, study them, and then base your decisions from what you learn. Prayer; pray to the Lord with your requests for direction, and then wait and listen for what he is telling you. Finally, trust that the way he leads you will take you to where he wants you to be. You might not understand why you are there at the time, but in time he will give you an understanding as to why he led you there. I wish to close with these words from Romans 8:25-28, “*(25)But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (26)Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. (27)And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (28)We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:25-28 NRSV*”