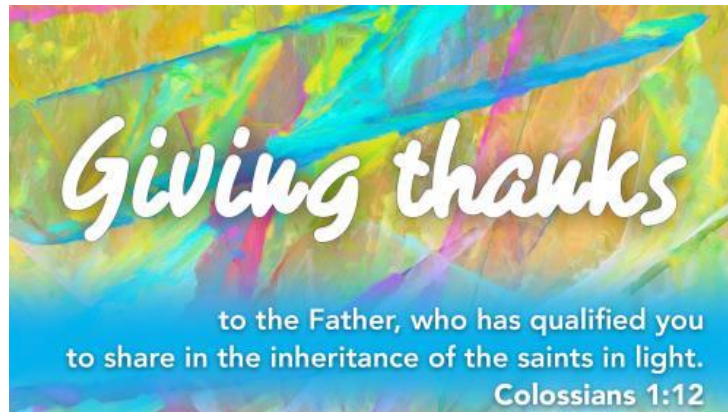


Sermon – July 10, 2022  
“Lead lives worthy of the Lord”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Colossians 1:1-14

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we join Jesus on this mission field. Amen*

Good morning! Let me continue to encourage us to pray the two short prayers on the back of the bulletin and listen for Holy Spirit speaking to us. As followers of Christ, we should experience fruit and gifts of the Spirit. Let me encourage us to pray, listen, and share what we receive during our times of listening. Take risks, and share what Holy Spirit may be speaking. We may find a prophetic word we receive has no meaning when shared, but keep praying and listening for Holy Spirit to speak. Pray for those whom Holy Spirit places on our minds during our times of listening and take the risk to call them and talk to them.

We might have noticed that we have left behind Paul's letter to the Galatians and have moved to his letter to the church in Colossae. Colossae is not a place where Paul visited or preached. Paul did not start the churches in Colossae. Paul has received word about churches there from one he disciplined and who shared the Good News about Jesus Christ. Colossae is another Roman city where the gods and goddesses of Rome are worshiped. There is a strong continuing Jewish presence there, a community that was begun before Jesus' arrival, that has been thriving and growing. The Jewish community in Colossae was known in Rome from their payment of the half shekel to the temple, not because of their devotion to Jerusalem and the

temple, but because the Roman leadership realized there was a large amount of gold being sent from this area that included Colossae to Jerusalem, gold that the Romans wanted to stay in the area or come to Rome.

Notice how Paul begins this letter. He introduces himself and Timothy and addresses the letter to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae. This is a standard introduction format for a letter of the time, but let's look at the words Paul uses. He speaks to the saints and faithful in Christ in Colossae. These are not super Christians that Paul is speaking to. Saints for Paul are those who are God's holy people, chosen and set apart by God for Himself. We will find the word "saints" used to address the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and Paul uses this same address in Colossae to include the Gentile Christians among the people of God, those who share in the promises given by God. We, those seeking to follow Jesus in this place, would also be saints, a people set apart as holy people of God. Paul speaks to saints in Christ in Colossae. We should catch the phrase, "in Christ in Colossae" and ask, "Are we those who are in Christ in Burgess and Ophelia? Are we in Christ? Are we a set-apart people in this place? Can the people of our community tell we are different by our love for each other and by our love for them? So, how do we understand and live out this idea of being in Christ in Burgess and Ophelia?"

Let's look at what it means to be in Christ. First, to be in Christ means we are incorporated into Jesus in a manner that he encompasses our entire life. When people see us, they see Jesus. When we are out in the community serving people, they are served by Jesus. All of our life reflects Jesus. Next, to be in Christ means that we are joined to Jesus and to no other. One cannot serve any other god, thing, or cause and still be in Christ. If we are in Christ, we must be Christ's alone; he alone is our all in all. Third, if we are in Christ, then Christ and Christ alone determines our behavior. We are not those who are found to be of the world. We are not those into magic, or pop culture, drugs, or other addictive behaviors. Those who are in Christ have the behaviors that Christ had and has. Next, to be in Christ means that we are joined to Christ in a manner that we cannot be separated from him. We not only believe in Christ, but we are joined to him in the power of Holy Spirit. Finally, to be in Christ means that we are joined to a new family, not a family determined by who our parents were, who our friends are, a shared physical characteristic, or a choice we have made. We are joined to a new family with no dividing lines.

We are only singularly in Christ and can only be categorized as those who are in Christ. Church, we should ask ourselves, are we “in Christ?”

Over the last several weeks, we have begun seeking to hear Holy Spirit speak to us as we increase our openness to him as a source of guidance. As churches, we have also been called into a time of discernment about the future alignment of this church. Let me encourage us to make time in our week to join together and learn about the possibilities the future holds for us as a church and pray together seeking to discern the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking to our situation. We are coming together and listening for Jesus’ voice so that we might follow him. As we have gathered and prayed, those present are beginning to sense the presence of Holy Spirit, so I want to encourage all of us to join together and participate in these times of prayer.

Have you ever had someone ask you to pray for them? I like requests for healing that are specific, you know, “I have shoulder pain, or foot pain or some illness.” When we get those requests, we can pray for healing, for Jesus to heal them as we have read about him healing in the scriptures. But how do we pray for each other? It is a good question. Do we pray for God’s blessings on people? Do we pray that they will have a good day? Do we pray that we will love each other? As I read this morning’s scripture, I was drawn to the scripture where Paul tells us what he prays for other Christians. Look with me for a few minutes at the model for prayer Paul uses as he tells those in Christ in Colossae how he is praying for them. Let’s see if we can capture some or all of this approach to help us pray for each other. Maybe if we study Paul’s model, we too will grow in knowledge about how to pray for each other and how to pray for those Holy Spirit places in our paths or on our hearts.

The first prayer Paul prays is to thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the faith of the Colossians. We can do the same when we pray for others. We can also thank God for the faith they have in Jesus and the love that we have received and seen others receive as a result of that faith. Make this prayer simple, “Thank you, God, for the faith of my friend in Christ.”

Next, Paul asks God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. This is an awesome prayer request for others, asking God to fill them up and help them understand the knowledge of God’s will for them. Paul is asking God to help the Colossians grow in their knowledge of spiritual wisdom and understanding. This prayer is asking God to let someone see Him more clearly through Jesus’ revelation of God,

God's will for them. We could pray something like, "Holy Spirit, come and open my friend's heart to complete knowledge of God's will for their life."

Next, Paul prays that the Colossians lead lives worthy of the Lord. We could pray this for a long time for another person, asking God to so shape their lives that they begin to be transformed into a Christ follower who is worthy of the Lord. This is a prayer with infinite depth and is a prayer of great love for the other person, asking God to act powerfully in their life. We will never be worthy as we are, but Christ can and does transform us into his image and that is what we ask Jesus to do. Again, start with a simple prayer such as, "Jesus, transform my friend into one who is worthy of the Lord. Give them a heart of love that reflects you to everyone."

Paul then prays that the lives of the Colossians may be fully pleasing to God. What another awesome prayer! When we pray this, we are asking God to help the person we are praying over to be someone who is not just sometimes pleasing to God but is fully so. As we pray, we ask God that this person may bear fruit in every good work that comes as they grow into the knowledge of God and a deeper understanding of what might be good works before God. What another great prayer request to lift to God for another person, that that may bear good fruit in their labor. And keep in mind when we pray this over another, that fruit for Paul is someone joining the kingdom of God. This prayer moves beyond asking for our service to be good fruit to asking that we disciple another person and are used by God in the power of Holy Spirit to bring that person into the kingdom of God. We could simply pray, "Jesus, would you guide my friend through the Holy Spirit today that they would be the next step or final step in bringing a person into your kingdom?" We are praying that God will bless another person with such fruit.

Then Paul prays that the Colossians will be made strong with the strength that comes from God's glorious power. This is Paul asking for Holy Spirit to strengthen them with power from on high. We too can and should pray this for each other, asking God to give our friend His strength for the work they have before them in Christ that day. The last part of Paul's prayer is not one we typically think to pray. Paul asks that the Colossians would be prepared by God through empowerment by Holy Spirit to endure with patience and have joy within that is seen as them giving thanks to the Father for the power given them to endure in trials. This is another prayer that we should pray for each other. We don't know what trials a day will hold for another person, so we pray that God will help them endure with patience and in joy whatever they experience. Paul's prayer is to endure persecution, but it applies to the trials and challenges of

our day. Our prayer here could be, “Jesus, pour your Holy Spirit upon my friend that they might be strengthened with your power to endure with patience and joy the trials they face this day.”

Paul closes this section of his prayer for the Colossians with a request for God to give them a share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. We also can pray this for each other, asking God to enable our brother and sister to have a share in the inheritance of the saints of light. Jesus has, through the cross, rescued us from the power of darkness and moved us into his kingdom. We can ask God to help our brother or sister to experience more fully the hope of this coming inheritance as saints of light. Give thanks that God has through Jesus given them redemption and forgiveness of sin. We can pray something like, “Father, I thank you for the salvation that Jesus gave my friend and ask that you help them to fully experience that gift.”

Now, I realize this is a different approach to prayer so don't worry if we don't fully apply all of the aspects Paul outlines for us. Just remember that when someone asks us for prayer or Holy Spirit brings someone to our mind, we can go to Colossians 1:9-14 and find new inspiration for prayer for them. Give this a try, pray through the church directory over the next few weeks daily, applying Paul's approach for prayer for others and see if this approach doesn't change how we pray for each other and those in our community whom we are led to lift up in prayer.

*Pray with me: Father God, we praise you that Christ is in us and that we are at work for you in Burges and Ophelia. Jesus, guide us into times of rich prayer for each other and open our hearts to the guidance of Holy Spirit that we might pray for others in this place, right here, right now. We lift our prayer this morning and always in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

#### PRAYER TO HOLY SPIRIT

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy

Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430)