

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:1-14

Following an Easter service, a woman approached a pastor and asked, "So what happened with Jesus after the resurrection?"

"Well, he ascended into heaven and he's still alive," the pastor said.

"I know he was resurrected, but is he really alive?" she asked.

"Yes, he's alive."

"Alive? Alive? Why didn't you tell me?"

For the next two weeks, she telephoned everyone she knew and exclaimed, "Jesus is alive! Did you know he's alive?"

Yes, Jesus is alive! So, what does that mean for our lives? Are we living a life worthy of the Living Christ? What does that even mean? Let's explore today's scripture because I believe it will give us some answers.

The text that was read for us this morning was a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian church in Colossae. Many of the early Christians first came to know Paul as a man hunting Christians to silence them. He believed he was doing it for God's sake and for the sake of the Jewish faith. Paul was not living a life worthy of Christ. But God turned him around and soon Christians knew him as a friend and a faithful servant of God.

Paul had never actually been to Colossae and so he has to begin by making clear what right he has to send a letter to the Colossians. He does that in one word; he calls himself an apostle; or as we read in the Message interpretation of this scripture, "I have been sent on special assignment by Christ," Paul's right to speak is that he was sent out by God to be God's ambassador to the Gentiles.

Furthermore, he is an apostle not because he asked to be one, not because he earned or achieved the right to be one; it was something given him by God. "You did not choose me," said Jesus, "but I chose you" (John 15:16). Here is the message of grace. We are chosen and sent out on special assignments for God's mission. The easy part of being a Christian is to open your heart to Jesus. The more challenging part can be stepping up to the plate to fulfill the responsibility Christ gives us for God's mission of building the Kingdom.

Steve Sample, author of "The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership" tells this personal story about this topic. In the spring of 1970, when I was twenty-nine, I learned I had won a fellowship from the American Council on Education, which would allow me to serve an administrative internship with Purdue University President Fred Hovde for the 1970-71 academic year. I was elated by the opportunity. Despite having only recently been awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor of electrical engineering at Purdue, I was already leaning toward a career in administration,

Soon after the award was announced, I happened to bump into a colleague, Vern Newhouse, who was a highly respected senior member of the electrical engineering faculty. "So Sample," Newhouse said to me, "I see you've won some sort of administrative fellowship in the president's office."

"Yes, that's true," I said.

"And you'll be learning how to become an administrator?"

"I suppose so."

"And then you'll probably want to be president of the university somewhere down the road?"

"Well, I don't know. I guess I've thought about it now and then," I said somewhat disingenuously.

He smiled and said, "Personally, I've never had any ambition whatsoever to be an administrator. I am totally inept at managing things, But I've been a careful observer of ambitious men all my life. And here, for what it's worth, is what I've learned: many men want to *be* president, but very few want to *do* president." And with that he wished me well and walked away.

And there it is, some people want to *be* Christian, but few want to *do* Christian. So, living a life worthy of Christ involves not only being Christian, but it also entails doing Christian. Christ chooses us to do Christian.

Paul praised the Colossians for doing Christians. While that may sound impersonal, maybe something like Christ hanging up a "to do" list on the refrigerator, it's really quite the opposite. Doing Christian is very intimate.

We find evidence of this truth also at the beginning of this text. You see, Paul introduced Timothy as a dedicated brother to the people of God. He wasn't called a preacher or teacher, a theologian, or overseer; but a brother, someone who walks alongside of those he serves. Paul also called the members of the Colossian church sisters and brothers, people who walk alongside those they serve.

Our faith in God guides us to walk alongside those whom we serve. Someone who walks as one who is unapproachable, or considers himself/herself superior to others can never really be a servant of Jesus Christ. Paul had heard of the Colossians faith in Christ Jesus and of the love they had for all God's people. It is our faith in Christ that fills us with love for all of God's people, which draws us to the side those whom we serve.

The call to walk alongside those we serve is a personal one. Paul acknowledged this in his greeting that while they were a holy people, a group; he also addresses them as individuals within that holy group when he names them as sisters and brothers. That's not how Paul greeted the Christians in earlier letters he wrote to the churches.

In those letters Paul began by saying, "Dear church;" at least that may be how he would say it today. But as he got older and grew in his faith, he began to understand that the church is made up of individuals, all different but bound together by Christ, all with responsibilities and gifts to contribute to the life of the church, all called by God.

And so, it is with us. Being a part of a church, or saying that we are a member of a church does not excuse us from living a life worthy of Christ, a life of faithfulness and love, from doing the personal assignment we are given. Christians do work together, but really, it all begins on a personal level. We come to Christ by our own choice and from there we seek to become the person God created us to be, and we join the ranks of God's faithful and obedient children.

At the close of his greeting, Paul acknowledges that the people live in two worlds, the world of Christ and in this world, the location where they live. People move about from place to place, leaving some things behind and taking others with them; however, Christ goes with us wherever we go. He lives within us.

Paul gives thanks for the Colossians because he has been told they are living with two great qualities in their lives, faith in Christ and love for their neighbors. These are two qualities necessary for those professing to be Christians. These qualities shine through in all Christians say and do. "It is not enough simply to have faith, for there can be a belief which knows no love. It is not enough only to have love for neighbor, for without real belief that love can become mere sentimentality.

Paul wrote, "That faith and love depend on the hope that is laid up in heaven. What exactly does Paul mean? Is he saying that we love just so we can go to heaven? No, there's more to it than that. The Christian hope is that God's way is the best way and that the only real peace, the only real joy, the only true and lasting reward are to be found in hope. Loyalty to Christ may bring trouble here – but that is not the last word. The world may laugh contemptuously at the folly of the way of love – but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of humanity. The Christian hope is the confidence that it is better to stake one's life on God than to believe the world." (William Barclay)

At the end of this text, we find Paul praying for the Colossians. It is there that we are instructed to continually ask for the **discernment of God's will** and then for the power to perform that will. Prayer can become a list of things we want God to do for us. Even when we pray for others, we may try to tell God how to do his job, forgetting that God knows what is best for us and those we love. We need to trust God not only to honor and to answer the requests we lift to him; but we also need to trust God to reveal his will to us, AND give us the power to perform that will.

Each and every believer is chosen by God for a special assignment, to not only be Christian, but also to DO Christian. Walking alongside lovingly with those God puts on our path. Holding on to the hope of confidence that it is better to stake our life on God than to believe the world. Praying for discernment of God's will and not our will to be done through us. This is living a life worthy of Christ. Live your life each day for Christ. Amen.