

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 17, 2018
Colossians 1:3-8**

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

What would you include in a list that describes someone is worthy of praise? Would you include putting a job well done on your list of things which are worthy of praise? Perhaps as a kid you do a good job mowing the lawn and as a result your mom, dad, grandma or grandpa told you, "You did a great job mowing the lawn. I don't think I could have done it better myself. Here is \$20. Go out and get something nice for yourself."

Could it be a good job cleaning the house? Working in the yard? Nailing a huge project at work? What is something we would deem "praiseworthy"? The apostle Paul speaks about people who praiseworthy. He is writing to the Colossians. The Colossians are a unique group of Christians because Paul didn't found this church. He only heard about it from his friend Epaphras, who coincidentally, Paul describes as someone being worthy of praise.

Paul speaks about him in glowing terms, **"You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf."** But what would cause Paul to speak so highly of Epaphras and call him a dear fellow servant? He does so because Epaphras was a faithful minister who shared the good news about God's salvation with people who didn't know about Jesus yet. How do we know this is what Epaphras did?

Epaphras was the founder of the church in Colosse and he shared with Paul the good things which were happening in Colosse. **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you."**

"All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit." Epaphras told Paul how the Colossians were bearing positive Christian fruit in their lives and how they were making this love evident to the people around them.

Epaphras' news caused Paul to praise not only Epaphras for sharing the gospel, but also the Colossians for the response they showed to the gospel. Listen to the way he speaks about the Colossians. **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints."** Sounds like Paul is doing a bit of gushing doesn't it? Wouldn't you have loved to receive the praise the Colossians did?

I mean imagine having the apostle Paul saying he always thanks God when he prays for you because the gospel is bearing fruit in your life. It would be like, for a Christian, having the President of the United States saying you did a great job helping someone who needed help. That's what it was like for the Colossians. His gushing praise must've made them feel good for living their Christian lives. But how would his gushing praise make them feel so good?

They would feel good because receiving praise feels good. How do you feel when you are complimented? How do you feel when someone tells you good job? How do you feel when someone

recognizes your sacrifice? You feel good because praise means someone recognizes your hard effort. It shows someone actually appreciates the work you are doing or the sacrifice you are making. It makes it all worthwhile.

But praise is a funny thing isn't it? It's kind of like an addictive drug. You get a little taste once, twice, three times and you become hooked. Maybe when you become hooked on the good feeling from praise it means that you start to do things differently. Example: Maybe you take the garbage out at home without being asked and you get a reward for doing it. This reward plants an idea in your head. If I got a reward once, why not twice?

You notice the garbage getting full and decide to take it out, but no one notices and you don't get a reward. You take it out again, but this time you have a plan. You start making all kinds of noise and complain about how heavy the garbage is and how much it smells. By the time you are done taking it out, not only does the whole house know, but everyone within a half a mile knows too. You took the garbage out and no one asked you to take it out.

So you walk into the house and fully expect to be rewarded, but instead a reward you get yelled at by mom, dad or your spouse because you made such a big deal about your chore. You begin to get angry yourself and start to shout back, "What did I do? Why are you yelling at me? I took the garbage out and you didn't even ask me to. Now you are yelling at me? Forget ever doing anything nice again without being told. It isn't worth it,"

Does this ever describe your relationship with God? You work hard. You serve him the best way you can by being a good employee, student, parent, son or daughter you can be. You come to church. You say your prayers. But no matter how hard you try your life still stinks. Your problems stay the same and don't go away. People reject you and make you feel bad. Work feels like a dead end. Your marriage is in a rut. You can't wait to grow up. You wish you could get rid of your responsibilities.

You begin to ask, "Doesn't God notice what I'm doing for him? Why doesn't he reward me and praise me?" But then it hits you. If God doesn't reward me and praise me, why do I have to obey him? God wants me to be nice to people who are mean and rude, but why should I do that? They are mean and rude to me. They have it coming when I am mean and rude right back. God wants me to put others first, but when I do my feelings get hurt. Why should I do it if he doesn't reward me for serving him?

These thoughts and attitudes seem normal and reasonable, but would the apostle Paul consider them worthy of praise? No. He wouldn't consider them worthy of praise because these selfish attitudes and desires reflect life according to our sinful nature. They reflect a way of life that hides the fruit of the gospel rather than showing the fruit of the gospel. He would condemn our actions and call them what they truly are: sin.

But what caused him to praise the Colossians? What did they get that we are missing? **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from**

the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.”

“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” The Colossians got and understood the goodness of the gospel. They knew and realized how sweet the gospel really is, and sometimes we take it for granted. We sometimes think Jesus’ love for us is something we earn and we deserve, but we need to remember the gospel is priceless. It is God’s free gift to us.

This fact is absolutely mind blowing. The amazing part is your love and appreciation of this fact will grow the more you study and explore God’s Word and grow in your life of bearing Christian fruit. How so? I mean, the more I explore and understand how God wants me to put him first in everything and me second, the more I am blown away by his love for me. I haven’t ever tried to count my sins in a day, but I thought about it for a little bit, how many sins do I commit in one day?

How many do you think you’d commit? I will be brutally honest and guess it is in the thousands. But you might object and say thousands is too high. How can you guess thousands? I guess thousands because I’m a sinner. I whine, complain, lust, worry, am selfish, get angry and the list goes on countless times a day. I don’t know about you, but if someone did all those things against me every day, I would have walked away from them a long time ago.

But that is why Jesus’ love for me blows me away. He didn’t walk away from me. Instead he saved me. He came and took away every single one of those sins away for me. He put me first in everything he did here on earth. This truth is the gospel. This is what the Holy Spirit used to bring me to faith. This incredible and indescribable gift which I did nothing to earn and nothing to deserve is mine because Jesus’ loves me. I could never say that if I didn’t realize how hard the struggle against sin really is.

This struggle against sin and living a God-pleasing life is what being a fruit bearing Christian is all about. It isn’t easy. Our sinful nature hates bearing Christian fruit. It likes to complain, whine and be selfish. It tries to make us hide the fact we are Christians. It overwhelms us and overpowers us at times. It can make our lives feel miserable. It can lead us to ask, “What is the whole point of this struggle? Why do we want to bear Christian fruit?”

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.” We want to bear Christian fruit because it is worthy of praise. Amen.