

Jesus is Lord!
"Letting You in on a Little Secret"
November 15, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Colossians:

Most important for understanding Colossians are the circumstances to which Paul's responding. Colossians 2:8-23 indicates that the Colossians are facing temptation to turn to distinctively Jewish practices, such as circumcision (Col 2:11), food laws (Col 2:16), and Sabbath keeping (Col 2:16). Some scholars propose that these verses suggest a form of early Jewish Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a religion that seeks special knowledge in order to escape from this corrupt world. However, the material in Colossians 2 is better explained by the potential appeal of Judaism to non-Jewish converts to Christianity.

Throughout, the letter demonstrates that Christ is better than all alternative means of salvation. It insists that Christ is enough for salvation: no additional knowledge or special Jewish practices are needed. Christ created the universe and set it free from hostile powers. His story shapes the story of the world and of all the people in it. Those who wish to know the great secret of how God will restore the world need only listen to the openly declared gospel of Christ (Col 2:2). The future hope for the whole universe (Col 1:20), and everyone in it (Col 1:27-28), is known in Christ. Freedom from enslaving powers (Col 1:16) and transformed lives that please God (Col 3:1-17) are known only in Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ decide the fate of the universe.

-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 381-382 (NT)

Reflect on these Scriptures:

Colossians 2: 6-10 NIV ⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ. ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Commentary:

These two verses make absolutely clear that in Christian existence orthodoxy and orthopraxis go hand in hand; “talking the talk” cannot be separated from “walking the walk.” But what is said in Colossians takes us beyond such basic assertions. The pattern of this exhortation to Christian living that involves an indicative statement followed by an imperative is sometimes referred to by the slogan “Become what you are.” This is helpful in pointing out that the indicative of the new life in Christ, to which the apostolic teaching points and which it attempts to safeguard, is more than simply a possibility; it is real. At the same time, the fact that an imperative is still needed makes clear that the new situation is still in progress and that the relationship between who one is in Christ and how one lives is not an automatic one. The pattern shares, therefore, in the eschatological tension typical of Pauline thought. The indicative reflects what God has already done in Christ in inaugurating the new order, while the imperative is the exhortation to appropriate and live this out in the midst of the powers of this present age that are still at work. Here the formulation about having “received Christ Jesus the Lord” (2:6) highlights that it is the implications of that lordship for all of believers’ lives that need to be lived out.

In a letter that from this point will consist of a whole series of imperatives, it is crucial for the writer to establish what he sees as the proper perspective on Christian ethical exhortations. They do not represent an impossible ideal or a crushing burden. It is not uncommon to hear people complaining that their employers are increasing their workload or expanding their jobs but not providing them with the necessary resources. Colossians underscores that the necessary resources have already been made available for the task of Christian living and that there is no need to be numbed by the sense of powerlessness that makes us spectators in life. What is more, the motivation for living the good life is not a fear of punishment or a sense of duty or a need to be needed or a hope of reward (whether in the afterlife or in this life in terms of self-fulfillment). For those of us who are prone to be driven by such motivations, the relationship symbolized by the indicative and the imperative can provide a healthy reminder that the primary dynamic that should govern Christian behavior is rather a living out of our relationship to Christ, an appropriating of what God has already accomplished in Christ. This also puts the emphasis where it belongs in Christian living not on

human willpower or effort but on God's grace – and enables such living to be characterized by thankfulness (2:7).

– adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, XI, 620-621.

This week – Letting You in on a Little Secret

Humans have always sought to address that something missing within. We have consistently tried to satisfy that inner hunger. The first time this happens in the Bible is Genesis 3:5 as the serpent of old uses the oldest line in the book, literally: I'll let you in on a little secret - God is bluffing ... God is holding out on you. You can eat the forbidden fruit and there will be no adverse consequences - only positive. ⁵ *"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Tragically, all our forebears got from the fruit was a brief sugar high and an empty heart.

We humans have always been looking for that piece of magical fruit, that 'secret sauce' that will change everything. Hundreds of times a day we are told that someone or some company is offering that secret ingredient - the secret to looking younger, losing weight, success in business, beating the stock market, the secret to finding true love, lasting happiness, parenting children, etc. And we have these little 'secrets' in the church world as well. Just read this book. Just go to this conference. Just listen to this podcast. Just pray this prayer – It's better than the prayer of Jabez!

2000 years ago the people of Colossae were no exception. They were feeling like they were missing something. They felt vulnerable - that there were forces beyond them troubling their lives. They were looking for the 'secret sauce,' the secret solution to being in control, invulnerable.

And there was a growing philosophical movement influencing Colossae – it was all the rage! The gist seems to be - Jesus is fine, to an extent. But the secret to really being in control is ... THE PHILOSOPHY! And when others are excited about something – it's tempting to not want to miss out.

Now "The Philosophy" hasn't survived, so we don't know exactly what they were selling. But reading between the lines we get some hints. It seemed to involve some kind of rigorous spiritual boot camp –

- +elements of OT observance with
- +dualist philosophy (physical world is bad – spiritual is good) with
- +astrology and rigorous fasting of some kind
- leading to promised visionary experience involving angels that apparently would give one spiritual power and a sense of control.

It was just the latest and greatest philosophical fad that had come their way. And as with a lot of things, when they are practiced there might be some placebo effect.

Ultimately, however, it was a philosophy that promised much, but could not sustain anyone for the real journey of life. Paul basically declares that in Christ alone the Colossians have been brought to fullness. The 'secret' to abundant life is found in receiving Christ as Lord, and continuing to live one's life in him.

The ancient, time-tested way of **continuing** to follow Jesus into greater abundance has included the following practices in our Methodist tradition:

Prayers
Presence
Gifts
Service
Witness

According to Colossians, that 'something missing' within cannot be satisfied through a fad, or the latest and greatest, but through receiving Christ as Lord and continuing in him.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. Have you ever sought out a 'secret sauce' solution to address a personal problem or to lead you to a life of success? How did that work out for you?
2. What are some of the most popular "secret sauces" in the world today?
3. In terms of your ongoing growth in Christ, how would you characterize your current journey? Growing? Holding your own? In a bit of a rut? In decline?
4. Regarding the 5 vows of United Methodist Christian discipleship - prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness - how are you growing in each? Is there one in particular that needs some attention?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: *Colossians 2: 6-7 NIV* ⁶ *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*
3. Read the book of Colossians this week and reflect on its' message. Write down insights and seek to apply them to your everyday life.