

**LET YOUR LIVING SPILL INTO THANKSGIVING**  
Hosea 1:2-10; Colossians 2:6-15

As I read the Lectionary passages for today, I found Paul's Letter to the Church at Colossae to be confusing. As I most often do, I turned to other interpretations and translations. As I read *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, I found a new understanding. I offer this to you:

<sup>6</sup> *My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him.* <sup>7</sup> *You're deeply rooted in him. You're well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! **And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.*** <sup>8</sup> *Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ.* <sup>9</sup> *Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him.* <sup>10</sup> *When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.* <sup>11</sup> *Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve. It's not a matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you're already in—insiders—not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin.* <sup>12</sup> *If it's an initiation ritual you're after, you've already been through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as he did Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven,* <sup>14</sup> *the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross.* <sup>15</sup> *He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets."*

"Let your living spill over into thanksgiving." As I read this passage, I heard Paul encouraging the people to live lives of thanksgiving for all God has done and continues to do, through Jesus Christ. To this point in the letter, Paul has been preparing the ground. Now he comes to the reason he felt compelled to write this letter to the people of Colossae who. He had not met.

The problem in the church at Colossae was that Satan had introduced error into the faith and practice of the Christians. This is always Satan's action, and it is as prevalent in the church today as it ever was. Satan introduces error by suggesting that though faith in Christ is good, to have perfection something must be added, that our faith in God is not good enough on its face, that we must be better, or do more, in order to have the blessing of God.

We are not told specifically what the problem was but we can make some deductions. Because Paul makes his correction to the error in terms of 'circumcision', we can deduce that the act of circumcision was being pressed upon the Christians at Colossae as essential for the perfecting of their

religion. From this we can see that the traditions of the Jews were being pressed as an essential addition to faith in Christ.

Here is the heart of the problem of error in the church. It is the pressing of church tradition as a necessary addition to faith in Christ. What happens is that faith in Christ from the heart is gradually replaced by dependence on outward ceremony, rituals and church tradition. Like the problem with the Pharisees, religion becomes the performance of religious duties and activities, and when these are performed, this is seen as meriting God's favor, without any regard to holiness of heart.

However, Paul tells the Colossians to continue in Christ in the same way as they had always done when they first believed. This is faith in Jesus as an all-sufficient Savior, without any dependence on human efforts and works. He tells them that they must be 'rooted' in such faith. He tells them to build up their Christian life in faith in the teaching that they had received from Paul, the faith they were taught. Only in such faith will they be strengthened, and know overflowing thankfulness.

Paul warns the Colossians against the teachers who were suggesting that their faith in Christ needed to have additions to become perfect. He calls this deceptive philosophy because they depended on human tradition, that is human wisdom, and these teachings were the wisdom of the world! Not of God. The fact is that much religion is affected, not by the Word of God (which Paul taught) which is also the teaching of the Bible, but according to the ideas from earthly and human wisdom.

In these verses Paul seeks to show that in Christ and faith in him there is everything, and it needs no additions. In Christ is the fullness of God. Christ is the head of the Church and his authority is the only authority. His authority is the Bible which Jesus taught, and that is all that is necessary.

Circumcision is used by Paul as a reference to the new birth and new life which comes through faith in Christ. This new birth is the death of the 'sinful nature' which is what we inherit from Adam. New birth is achieved by the believer being united to Christ, so that the sinful nature was put to death with Christ on the cross, and a new nature was given because we are raised to new life in the resurrection of Jesus. This was achieved not by human effort, but by the power of God, the same power which raised Jesus from the dead. God makes us alive with Christ.

Then Paul shows how God has made it possible. Our sins are cancelled by the cross. God nailed the written code to the cross. All the condemnation of the written code was placed with Jesus on the cross so that Jesus took all the punishment for sin and sin lost its power and Satan lost his power to hold on to the sinner. Through faith in Christ we are saved. That's all. Through our faith, not our works, not our worthiness, through our faith in Christ Jesus we are saved. Not by our actions, but by God's actions on our behalf through Jesus.

Paul was convinced that in and through our Savior, Jesus the Christ, God is in the process of changing everything. The 'down side' of this good news is that we must be vulnerable to experience change. That's why the most vulnerable people in our world seem to have a way of pointing us most clearly to what God is doing through Jesus.

It is through this great love that we are made aware that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. That realization is enough to let our living spill over into thanksgiving. You see, God wants to be our dwelling place. God has no interest in being a weekend getaway or a Sunday bungalow or a summer cottage. God is not interested in being a vacation cottage or a retirement

home. God wants you, you, you, and you under his roof, now and always. God wants to be your mailing address. God wants to be your home.

For many thinking of God as a home is a new concept. All too often God is thought of as a mysterious miracle worker. We think of God as a Creator to call on, not a home to reside in. But God wants to be "the one in whom we live and move and have our being."

God also wants joy for our lives. God knows no difference between Sunday morning, or any other day. God longs for us to worship him in the workplace as well as the worship space. He longs to be worshipped when we sit at the dinner table as well as when we come to the communion table. You may go days without thinking of God, but God is ever present, and always thinking of and caring for you.

It is this life, living in God, who is so full that it has to spill over into thanksgiving. Mark Tidd of Webster, New York tells this story: An old man showed up at the back door of the house my college friends and I were renting. Opening the door a few inches, we saw his eyes were glassy and his furrowed face glistened with silver stubble. He clutched a wicker basket holding a few unappealing vegetables. He bid us good morning and offered his produce for sale. We were uneasy enough that we made a quick purchase to alleviate both our pity and our fear. To our chagrin, he returned the next week, introducing himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As our fears subsided, we got close enough to realize it wasn't alcohol but cataracts that marveled his eyes. On subsequent visits, he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes, and pulled out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he would puff out old gospel tunes between conversations about vegetables and religion. On one visit he exclaimed, "The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch."

"That's wonderful, Mr. Roth!" We said. "We're happy for you."

"You know what's even more wonderful?" he asked. "Just yesterday I met some people that could really use them."

God was Mr. Roth's dwelling place. Mr. Roth lived and let his living spill over into thanksgiving. As he lived in God, joy was his and he had everything he needed. God provided for him all he needed and more.

This morning I ask you to ponder these questions:

Have you bought into the world view that you need to do more in order to live the Christian life?

Do you spend time doing and being RIGHT? Do you enjoy the grace that God has given you through Jesus?

Is God your dwelling place Every Day, or only when it is convenient?

Do you live your life for God letting your living spill over into thanksgiving for all that God has and continues to do for you?