

## 5/21/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

### MORNING PRAYER

God who is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in times of trouble,

Your love is unchanging and your grace is unceasing.

You are the animating force of our lives, and of this marvelous creation which we enjoy.

We thank you for the shalom that you offer, and confess our constant temptation to pursue the totems of success, status, and wealth, rather than letting our foundation be the love you so lavishly offer.

God, this is a time of year when we celebrate graduations and promotions, and a time of transition for many of us.

Those involved with school are beginning a summer routine. Seniors are preparing to attend college for the first time in the fall. Some college students are returning home for the summer. College graduates are looking for work.

We pray for your presence and your wisdom to be with each one of these young people. We pray for each to find ways to work out what it means to follow Jesus in the next phase of life.

With any major life change, there is excitement, anxiety, and some loss. We pray for your presence and wisdom to be felt by all who are experiencing major change.

We pray that we might not pursue accomplishment or opportunity as a way to gain worth, but rather that we might know deep in our souls that we are already your beloved, whom you love even to the point of suffering, so that you might win our love and transform everything that is dead into life. Help us to carry a deep knowledge of who we are as we experience change.

We pray especially for those who have finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade, high school, college, or Master's work. May God empower each to continue to grow in their gifts and discover their vocation for the next season of life.

We also remember the Junior High youth as they prepare to go to Camp Tawakoni this coming weekend.

We give thanks for each youth, for the counselors, and most especially for Michelle and Laura who have invested much into this ministry and into the lives of these young people over the past number of years.

We pray also for our upcoming Bible school in a few weeks. We pray that Bible school may be a gift to our community and foster closer relationships, connections, and solidarity as we are touched by the good news of Jesus Christ.

We pray for those who are experiencing major health concerns. We remember Ilene as she recovers at Wesley. We pray for relief from pain and that she might quickly regain strength. We give thanks for Vernon's progress and pray that he can safely return home and continue to recover.

We give thanks to you in all things. Be in our thoughts, affection, and actions. Call us to open ourselves so that your refreshing and healing Spirit might flow through us, as you redeem all things.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

#### OFFERING PRAYER

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 2006 [VT 1019], adapted*

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.

Through your goodness you have blessed us with good gifts:

Our time, our passions, our education, our skills, our possessions, and indeed our very selves.

We receive these gifts in gratitude  
and offer them to the world with your love,  
through the one who gave himself for us,

Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

#### REFLECTION -- COLOSSIANS 2:6-19 – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Remember what you've learned

Congratulations to each of our graduates! You've learned and mastered, you've memorized and created, your minds have expanded as you've taken in new ideas and you've successfully completed the course that was set in front of you for whatever goal you reached. We're proud of each of you and we celebrate with you!

I wanted to find a scripture passage that talked about education and the learning process and when I came across this one from Colossians it piqued my interest. I hope it will do the same for you!

First a little background. This is a letter that was written to the young church in Colossae. The city had a diverse population. There were indigenous Phrygians, Greek settlers, some Jewish folks and likely some other groups represented as well. We don't know as much about Colossae as some of the other ancient cities because it was destroyed by an earthquake sometime around the year 61 C.E. But we know that (map) it was situated about 120 miles east of Ephesus in ancient Phrygia and was part of the Roman territory of Asia Minor. This is modern-day Turkey. It was one of three cosmopolitan cities in the area, along with Laodicea and Heirapolis, and as well as being on a fault-line, it was on a major highway from the NW to the SE that was a trade route. There were Persian and other Asian religions as well as Roman and

Greek ideas and practices and, of course, various practices of Judaism. So followers of The Way, those who followed Jesus in their life and practices, were in the minority there. (map off)

Because it was such a diverse and cosmopolitan city, (probably a population of about 25,000-30,000) the Colossians' education and world-view was pretty broad and all-encompassing. Most people in that time believed that Creation was organized on the basis of some kind of divine intermediary like Wisdom, or if one was Jewish, the Law. And they thought if people followed that particular "divine order", then they received blessings from the universe. And if they didn't follow the "rules" of the particular order they had chosen, then they didn't receive blessings and quite probably they would receive punishment! It was a very rewards-based understanding of how life worked; one could "earn" the favor of their divine intermediary and one could also "earn" their wrath or anger. A student could earn a place of honor – or a place of shame – in their teacher's class. The systems were strictly rule-bound; there were rigid restrictions and requirements, legalistic rules and regulations that needed to be followed – or suffer the consequences. One could say that this was the ancient cultural educational system and the young Jesus followers were facing some challenges within it.

With this letter, Paul wanted to remind them that no matter which system was prominent in the culture around them, they had chosen Jesus. Paul's challenge to the Christians in Colossae was for them to remember that **Jesus** was their divine intermediary. Jesus was the One who embodied all the fullness of the Creator of the Universe. In his life and teachings, in his humility as he accepted death by crucifixion, and in the ways that he was connected to God and brought hope beyond death in his resurrection, Paul says there is no other "structure" or method or person who more perfectly showed how the Creator intended for humanity to live.

Jesus showed us how to live in deep gratitude, reaching beyond the rule-bound systems, in an organic relationship between faith and action – faith IS action, action that is motivated by respect and love for the other.

As I kept reading, I was struck by the parallels and similarities from those ancient times to our own. And with that the conversation moves from those who are formally students "in school" to all of us who are life-long learners about how to follow Jesus. The wisdom in this letter is educational for every one of us. So take out your pencil and notebook and let's review!

There are three warnings along with three reminders in these verses:

First – Don't let anyone capture or ensnare you or lure you off the path through what some have called "high-sounding nonsense" or deceit. You might come across some people in this world who have evil intent with their philosophy or the way they use words to manipulate or plant seeds of fear. Remember – the good news of Jesus is not just words, a doctrine or a set of rules or regulations. It's a way of life! The verb that's translated "live" when it says we live in him, is literally "walk". So keep moving, living, walking in the ways of Jesus – and walk together! None of us is equipped or able to walk this journey alone. Look out for one another. Keep each other on the path and stay alert for traps or snares.

Second – Don't let anyone control you with legalistic requirements. Stay rooted and grounded in Christ, knowing that your life and identity are in him. Throughout our lives we shape our identity by trying to make meaning of our life and experiences. It's crucial to fellowship with others in the church and establish collective memories that celebrate Christ's presence and faithfulness in our lives. When we recall together times of experiencing Jesus' Spirit with us, we are given a sense of resilience, power and purpose in Christ.

And finally, don't let anyone disqualify you from your faith journey simply because you don't participate in the rituals and traditions they have established. There are lots of wonderful traditions that bring people together for all kinds of celebrations and observances. But Paul is reminding us to double-check and make sure that Jesus is at the center of our celebrations and gatherings. Again we read the familiar imagery of Christ as the head and the church is his body. We can find deep meaning and grounding in the rituals of the church as long as we're worshiping the One who calls us to express our faith through the rituals and not the rituals themselves. It's an expression of our faith commitment when we gather for worship and fellowship. We have the ritual of baptism in which we publically declare our intention to repent and follow Jesus. We have the ritual of communion in which we share the bread and the cup, remembering Jesus' sacrificial love for us. We celebrate when parents bring themselves and their children for dedication to God in the church, as we just did last Sunday. In all of these, Paul is asking us to check our pride or apathy at the door and be clear about our purpose and intent.

As we each continue to learn and deepen our faith in Jesus, may we continue to practice calling on him and his wisdom first. And may we live in gratitude for what we already know and have already experienced with Jesus and his Holy Spirit leading us. Amen.

Resources : BCBC, Colossians/Philemon; Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 3

#### GRADUATION RECOGNITION

Jaylee, Eli, and Natalie have finished their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. We recognize the transition of these young people into high school. They are growing in learning about themselves as well as all kinds of subjects.

We want to present new Study Bibles to these young people to encourage them to read and study the Bible on their own.

May God guide you as you continue to grow in your faith and understanding.

[Rachael and Brian Burkholder recognize the high school seniors]

#### COLLEGE AND CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

We also recognize graduates from college and graduate programs. Some of these folks are unable to be here today.

Julianna Schrag graduated from Bethel; Luke Wiens graduated from *Hutchinson Community College*

Jason Peters completed a Masters of Science in Education and Jody Schmidt completed her master's in educational administration.

Each of these folks will receive one of the mugs from Goertzen pottery that is up here.

Let's together offer a corporate prayer of response:

Come among us, Holy Spirit,  
and create a community of learning.

Help us grow  
in wisdom and understanding,  
in skill and strength,  
in knowledge that honors you.

Teach us  
to know you, ourselves, and our neighbors more fully,  
to see your presence in the world more clearly,  
to love more deeply—with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Form us  
as doers of justice and lovers of mercy  
as we walk humbly with you and one another  
on this path of learning. Amen.