

# Proper 12/Pentecost 7

## Colossians 2:6-15

### July 28, 2019

#### The Roots and Rhythm of Faith

Dear brothers and sisters loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We live in a world that highly adept at distraction. There are so many ways to become fixated on things that don't really matter. What matters? Well, in the life of the Christian what matters is the centrality of Christ. The reality of the nightly news, our busy schedules, the glitz of the entertainment industry, the passion that politics can work up — so much of that seems more real, more compelling than anything the waters of Holy Baptism have given us. This is the third of four weeks we are spending in St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians, one of the four so-called captivity letters of the apostle so named because they originated from a time of imprisonment. In this letter, as much as anywhere else in the New Testament, we are drawn back to the centrality of Christ, and we are reminded once again of the futility of what the world has on offer. We are reminded of the futility of everything that would distract us from Him. In our reading today from chapter two St. Paul describes the Christian life as rooted, built up, and established — a rhythm of faith that comes from receiving the teaching of the Holy Gospel that Paul himself has delivered. Here are the first two verses of this reading once



again: “<sup>6</sup>Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col 2:6–7). So let’s take a look at this rhythm of faith, a rhythm which flows from the centrality of Christ in the lives of all believers, the very pattern of life for all who are in Christ.

First things first: Paul reminds of a basic truth. You have received Christ Jesus the Lord. For the church in Colossae this came by the preaching of Epaphras — remember, he is the person we saw two weeks ago who has come to St. Paul with the concerns of heretical teaching in the church. He is the pastor to this church, probably ordained and appointed by Paul himself. Epaphras has delivered the Gospel message to the people — in the stead and by the command of Christ Himself he has proclaimed the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins unto eternal life. He has baptized them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And in this proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments the people receive Christ Jesus the Lord. And “you have been filled with Him.” Christ in full, who is Himself “the whole fullness of deity.” Nothing here is uncompleted, nothing is undone; in Baptism you have received new life, you are born again of Spirit and water. In that Baptism you received Christ Jesus the Lord, you were buried with Him. Now you are bound together with Jesus, you receive all the benefits of His redemptive work on the cross. And to receive Christ is to be “raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12). From darkness in to light, condemnation to justification, death to life, all by grace through faith.

You needed to be raised because you couldn't do it yourself. You needed to receive Christ because what He did and continues to do for you is not a work you can figure out on your own. Why not? The apostle says, “<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (Col 2:13–14). You see, there is a contract that we are party to that we really don't want. It's a certificate of indebtedness, written and signed by Adam. Adam contracted the debt, and by our own sins we increase the amount we owe. In this contract are written a curse, and sin, and death, and the condemnation of the law. But now it's all gone. The word that is translated for us as “cancelled” actually is better understood from the original Greek as to wipe off or wipe away, to cause something to cease by obliterating all evidence. Isn't that amazing? The record of debt is not only cancelled but any sign that our names were ever on that contract is gone, now we are made alive together with Christ.

So that takes us though just the eight words of our text! “<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord” (Col 2:6). You have received Him in faith because of the grace and mercy shown to you by God the Father. And now? There are implications to these eight words. There is a change in life and lordship brought about by this receiving of baptismal grace. So Paul uses one of his favourite words — walk — “walk in him.” St. Paul means to tell us about the nature of the believer's lifelong relationship with God. You see, the path you will walk on is determined by the spiritual force that controls your life. There are only two ways to go on this path, a life controlled by the evil inclination of that old contract or the new life we are raised to in Baptism. The child of God therefore

walks in the Word of God, believing and trusting and following. Christianity is called “the Way” because it involves walking on this path that is paved by Christ; it involves following Him along the road of life.

So the rhythm of the Christian life takes place along this path. Your faith is now rooted. To be rooted means being rooted in something, and I’m no one’s idea of a gardener but it seems really apparent that the quality and type of soil that plants are rooted in will determine how well they grow. That’s a good metaphor for the Christian life — Jesus thought so, remember the parable of the sower? The Lord says, “<sup>15</sup> As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience” (Lk 8:15). We must be rooted in something that aids in our growth, and that something in the life of a Christian is the good soil of God’s Word.

These roots grow down into that soil your entire life. The roots are what you build on, so that you are “rooted and built up in him,” and this is what being established in the faith looks like — firm in commitment, strengthened against all the prevailing tides and winds of an increasing secular culture. The apostle warns against this: “<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8–9). The writer of Hebrews also says to his church, “<sup>9</sup> Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace” Heb (13:9).

Rooted, built, and established in faith. This is the rhythm of faith. This is the walk of a Christian in Christ.

You are on this path and now God would have you put down deep roots into His Word in order to be built up and strengthened and confirmed and established. But how does this

actually happen? Well., that root growing can't happen apart from the gifts that Christ brings us through Word and Sacrament. And we know that these gifts are given right here in the Divine Service, week in and week out. The rhythm of the Christian life as being rooted and built and established cannot happen apart from His church. In fact it entirely matches the weekly rhythm of this place. This is where it happens, in worship where we hear the Gosple and receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Bible study, in corporate prayer, because in those times and in those places Christ is present according to His promise — “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Mt 18:20). This is the pattern for putting down those roots, for growing in faith, for discipleship: to be a regular in God's house, to be rooting in God's Word. Is there room for you to put down some new roots? Ask God for his help. He loves to answer prayers like that.

And how about daily life in the Word? Are you finding time everyday to be putting down new roots in order to be built and established on this walk in Christ? Perhaps we can all grow in that area — I know I can. Daily devotions — there are lots of resources out there to help. Pick one. Grow some new roots.

Remember that St. Paul is writing to this church in Colossae that is beset with false teaching. Something has gone wrong with what is going on there. We aren't sure what, but the antidote to whatever it might be, and the way to stay on the path of righteousness, is this rooting and rhythm of the Christian life. That's why St. Paul points them and us in this direction. And this is not a static life, we don't just come here once a week to withdraw into our pew and hope no one will notice that we are here. We are rooted, built, and established in Christ to be sure, but these roots are made for walking. The path

we walk in and with Christ leads us back out into the world where we live in relation to friends and neighbours and family. They are being rooted in something too, but is it the Word of God or those things St. Paul warns of? Invite them here to find out about the Way of truth and life. Ask God to keep your ears and eyes open to see and hear those who are looking for a different soil to start growing in. The roots and rhythm of life are lived in the centrality of Christ, in the good spoil of Word and Sacrament, the very pattern of this life for all who are in Christ Jesus the Lord.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ✠ Soli Deo Gloria