

“Faith, Love, & Hope”

Psalm 42:5-11

Colossians 1:3-14

In preparing for our Monday night and Wednesday morning Bible studies, I felt moved to do a sermon series based on Paul’s letter to the Colossians and our winter Bible study written by Ruth Chou Simons. I also want to thank our Bible study participants for their contributions.

If I should ask you who your greatest influencers are, you might say your hardworking father, your wise grandmother, or maybe one of your teachers or coaches. You might think of a close friend, pastor, or a person you work with.

A quote from the Bible study: “no one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do”. How true. Just one quick inventory of the thoughts that dominate our thinking on any day leaves us confronted with the truth: “we are what we think”.

What are some of the thoughts that go through your mind in the day-to-day? Here are a few of mine, even as I approach my 64th birthday in a few weeks.

I’ll never change. I’ll always have the same weaknesses. I didn’t spend enough time with my sons when they were growing up and still don’t. I favored my daughter too much. I don’t risk trusting people who I think might hurt me, my family, or the church. I’ve stayed too long at Divinity and am holding the congregation back. I can’t minister or lead if I don’t have all the answers. I need to work harder to get everything done.

I might call those statements lies if someone else said them. But if we allow those kinds of criticisms to form in our own minds, they will affect our daily lives.

So, you can see why no- one is more influential than you are. Proverbs 23:7 says: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”.

The principle is that our heart and our mind are connected. We can try to act or behave in a certain way, but ultimately, our actions will take the shape of what drives our hearts and minds.

Take an inventory. What are the most common thoughts that fill your mind in the day-to-day?

Maybe at a young age, we wrote the ideal script for our lives that may have included a good education, a good job, nice benefits, a wonderful spouse and fun friends who will never betray us, a vibrant church to plug into, and lots of opportunities to use our gifts in ways that feel natural and encouraging.

None of us plan to write confusion or failure or chapters of loss, pain, conflict, or suffering into our stories. No one plans to struggle to love her husband, to feel helpless in fatherhood, to feel lonely in ministry, to wrestle with identity.

Sometimes we need to join with the 42nd psalmist in asking, “Where is God?”

Psalm 42:11 . . . “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?” Hope in God; “for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

When our souls are cast down within us, hope in and praise God.

If the psalmist’s remedy for a downcast soul was to tell his soul to put his hope in God, then we must know why putting our hope in Jesus changes our hearts and minds. Somehow as believers we trust Jesus to save us from our sins, but we so easily forget He saves us to a new way of thinking, living, and being.

Paul put it well in his letter to the Romans which we studied this past fall. Romans 12:2. . . “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

We are transformed, we are changed, to a new way of thinking, living, and being.

Paul is sitting in a prison in Rome where he gets a report that the congregation he started in Colossae were being taught the heresy that Christ was not enough and needed to be combined with the other gods of the day, not unlike today. We try to fit Christ in to the values and culture of our day.

Paul in all of his letters, knows that to be filled with the truth of the gospel isn't a one-time born-again experience, but a daily clinging to what is true while discerning what is false. Jesus can then daily transform us to a new way of thinking, living, and being.

Paul always emphasizes that we cannot earn salvation. We cannot live well enough to get saved, but we live in a worthy manner because we are saved by God's grace through our faith in Christ.

Colossians 1:10 . . . “Lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

How do we lead a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing to him, and bearing fruit?

Paul uses three words in verses 4 and 5 to describe how to lead a life worthy of the Lord. “Faith, Love, and Hope.”

At the beginning of his letter in verses 3-6, Paul writes . . . ³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you

in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.

“We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”. As baptized children of God our parents, our godparents, and the whole congregation have hopefully raised and nurtured us in the Christian faith. As we grow older, we nurture and grow our faith through worship, Bible study, serving people in need, prayer, and in other ways that are unique to each of us in deepening our faith.

When Danette and I arrived at Dollywood as it was opening on a Saturday morning, the first show we went to was to listen to a quartet called the “Kingdom Heirs”. They sang Christmas and gospel songs that moved us to smiling, crying, clapping along, singing along, and preparing us in a new way to share our Christmas faith.

The deepest base singer I have ever heard, it sounded like the speakers were vibrating as he overloaded them, did a testimonial about the recent death of his father. He then did a solo that he wrote about his father and his grieving. It was powerful.

They sang 4 times a day, five days a week, 10 months a year. Dollywood closes in January and February and so they go on tour which included a Caribbean cruise with a gospel music theme. Danette and I went back in the late afternoon to listen to their fourth set which was all different songs than the first one.

We need to do what we need to do to deepen our faith, so we are transformed everyday “to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Paul writes, “because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.” Faith and Love.

The Jesus Creed – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, body, soul and love your neighbor, love all the saints as yourself.”

Love the Lakeside homeless men as yourself. Love the Afghan refugees as yourself. Love the Parma Park families in need as yourself. Love the families benefiting from our food pantry as yourself. Love folks who are grieving as yourself. Our Stephen Ministers love their care receivers as themselves. Our parish nurses trying to keep us healthy and reminding us how to love ourselves.

Why do we nurture our faith in Christ and love all the saints? In verse 5 “because of the hope laid up for us in heaven.” Faith, Love, and Hope.

What is true about Christ and our hope in him? Jesus had paid every debt we have ever owed as a sinner. He doesn’t just save us from guilt and condemnation. He saves us to freedom and eternal joy.

In verse 12, “We are qualified for our inheritance in Christ.” In verse 13, “Jesus delivers us from darkness to light.” In verse 14, “he forgives our sins.” This is how “we walk in a manner worthy of Him and bear fruit” (v.10).

So, we embrace gospel hope. We embrace faith, love, and hope.

The good news of Christ changes us every day. Each of us can preach our own sermon to ourselves this week. It might go something like this . . . I’m overwhelmed by my to-do-list. But because Jesus on the cross fulfilled every requirement ever needed to be acceptable in God’s sight, my to-do- list has nothing to do with being accepted or free.

So, I will do my to-do list as someone already approved, free, and saved. We will lead lives worthy of the Lord, pleasing to Him, and bearing fruit.

God gives us the gifts of Faith, Love, and Hope every day. The message of eternal hope is the most important sermon we can preach to ourselves.

Our Faith in Christ, our Love for one another, and our eternal Hope are the foundational truths upon which we rest everything else we believe about who we are and how we are called to live as followers of Christ.

Faith, love, and hope are the only fuel that will drive our efforts to obey, serve, and be fruitful in our faith. And when we believe God is who he says he is, we know he will sustain us through this life and through the gate of death into eternity.

May the peace of God . . .

#631 – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling