

## **“Let the Word of Christ Dwell In You Richly”**

### **Colossians 3:1-17**

In the past 2 weeks we passed through the wintertime and springtime of our faith journey. This week, we walk into the season of summer as the season of fruitful service and obedience. It's the season we all run toward – like the actual season filled with ripe strawberries and blackberries, red tomatoes, flower gardens bursting with color, and even in Northeast Ohio, long days with occasional sunshine.

Summer's season of the heart is when fruit is measurable, abundance is tangible, and what's true inside is made visible by what appears on the outside. Just as a garden yields much fruit in response to well-nourished growth, our offerings of service and obedience bear fruit from the wintertime foundation of knowing who God is and what he does and the springtime of rehearsing the truth of who we are in Christ.

We know who God is. We know who we are as Christians. Now we bear fruit. The summertime season of our lives is by far the longest season of our lives when we have prepared for it.

If we each take a moment to look back on our lives and the seasons or stages of our faith in Christ, many of us have been blessed with similar experiences. Many of us were blessed to have been raised and nurtured in our Christian faith. During the wintertime the foundation was laid as we grew up in our families and church learning who God is and what he does. In the springtime, in our younger adult years, we learned who we are and what we do in response to what God has done for us in sacrifice of His son.

The comes the summertime of fruitful service and obedience, and if we are so blessed as I have been and most of you have been, the summertime is the longest and most fun season of our lives.

Danette and I were blessed with 3 children and 3 spirit-filled congregations to raise them in. We were both able to use our God-given gifts to serve the people and communities of those congregations – Bethlehem, St. John, and Divinity.

After 3 years of seminary after college and a year of internship in Ypsilanti. We were blessed with a first call to a 2-point parish in rural North Dakota at the end of springtime of my life.

There, they partnered with me to learn who I was as a pastor and person. The foundation in Christ was laid as I transitioned into the summertime of serving on staffs in 3 large congregations

As I now look back after 38 years of pastoring, I see that my summertime of ministry paralleled my ministry with the teenagers I have so enjoyed.

In Fargo, Beatrice, and Parma Heights, I loved taking confirmands to summer Bible camps and taking youth in high school on Colorado backpacking experiences and other high adventures.

A few months ago, I received a phone call from a 50-year Chris Jackson in Fargo. He had been visiting his daughter and son-in-law in Kentucky and were sitting around the campfire telling stories. His son-in-law is a youth pastor in a church in Louisville. Chris started telling stories of his high school days and a trip to a national youth gathering in Dallas and camping on a beach for the gathering. Stories of backpacking in Colorado.

His son-in-law encouraged him to call me by finding Divinity's phone number for him. It was a long and affirming sharing of memories of the summertime of our lives. It was a reminder of what Paul wrote in his letters to the Galatians, and Colossians about how we are to walk and live during the summertime.

In Galatians 5, Paul writes, "Walk by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

What did Paul mean by "walk by the Spirit"? Jesus is always present. He's in us and walks beside us. When we're aware of his presence and guided by His Spirit, we're much more intentional in bearing the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In Ruth Chou Simon's Bible study of Colossians that I'm basing this sermon series on, she asked us "to describe a time when you tried to obey apart from a response to God's grace and your faith in Christ. Did it feel like a work or a fruit?"

I wrote, "When I've motivated people to fix and maintain the church buildings where I've served, it feels like works on my part rather than a response to God's grace. Although the results are tangible, visible, and immediate like fixing the decades old and un-diagnosed ceiling leak in the hallway and the resulting new ceiling. Ministry with people, with brothers and sisters in Christ, does not always yield results. But a phone call 30 years later, affirmed that our ministry with one another does bear fruit.

So, whether we're fixing a leak or backpacking with teenagers, we are bearing the fruits of the Spirit even though it may not feel like it.

Next on the Divinity building list, repairing and painting our chapel walls.

Paul makes it pretty clear in Philippians 4:8 . . . “Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable – if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy – dwell on these things.”

We respond to our faith in Christ by taking action in serving the needs of others. We do what is true, honorable, and just through our serving in the Lakeside Homeless Shelter, with Afghan refugees, with the Parma Park families, with the Redeemer Crisis Center. We do what is pure, lovely, and commendable through our Divinity food pantry, through Lutheran Huger and Disaster Response, through Stephens and parish nurse ministry, through hosting Girl Scouts, A.A., Al Anon, the Rangerettes, and any group that rents our fellowship hall.

Paul says to dwell on these things because all our ministries are praiseworthy. “Set your mind, dwell on these things, in response to the truth of God’s Word. We respond to our faith in Jesus Christ.”

In our text from Colossians 3, Paul began to tell the Colossians and us how to respond to our faith in Christ. He started with verse 1 and the phrase, “If then you have been raised with Christ.” All the instruction that follow for the Christ follower are predicated on our being children of God, co-heirs, buried and raised with Christ. These are our instructions for how to live as a Christ-follower, a baptized child of God.

1. Seek the things that are above.
2. Put to death what is earthly in you – immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness.

3. Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk
4. Do not lie to one another.
5. Put on the new nature – compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love.
6. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.
7. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.
8. Whatever you do, do in the name of Jesus.
9. Give thanks to God the Father.

Wow! That’s an intense picture of the Christian life. We cannot just jump to this summertime list of bearing fruit without the wintertime of learning who God is and what He does and the springtime of rehearsing and practicing the truth of who we are in Christ as baptized children of God. We first need to be rooted in the truth.

These 9 acts of faith would have no vine to grow from if it was not rooted in Christ. Without Christ and his body-the church-we have no strength, no nourishment, no motivation to act in servanthood.

Our response in faith has an order. We must put off the old self everyday before we can put on the new self. Which is to say, to respond in obedience and faith to God’s work in our lives is to respond everyday in denying and putting to death what can rule our hearts – our sinful, self-focused thoughts. This is why we preach truth to ourselves every day.

Any form of obedience, fruitfulness, and other faithfulness is the work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. As Paul writes in verse 16, “it is the word of Christ dwelling in you richly”.

We respond to “Christ dwelling in us richly” with loving offerings of gratitude as we receive the gift of God’s grace.

God doesn’t desire for you to work at looking the part of a so called “Holy Christian”. Instead, God longs for you to abide in Him so He might faithfully bring about fruit in your life.

May the peace of God . . .

#510 – Word of God, Come Down on Earth