Inheritance

Psalm 8 Kimby Young

Colossians 1:9-20 July 24, 2016

Today’s scripture from Colossians shares some familiar language with some of the other letters we have heard this summer in worship. It is another epistle written to an early church giving advice and encouragement. We don’t know much about the people of Colossai. It is not mentioned in the book of Acts as a town to which Paul travelled or a church which Paul established, though it is near enough to Ephesus that Paul could have started a satellite church there, or people from the Ephesus church could have moved to Colossai to start a church. We don’t know the occasion for the writing of this letter – unlike Philippians which was written in response to a gift, or Corinthians written in response to a conflict in the church, or Romans which was written to try to persuade the people to support a new mission. This is a much less personal letter than some that Paul wrote, and the language is a little different, which has led some people to dispute whether Paul actually wrote this letter. While that debate is interesting, I don’t think it really matters for our purposes. The advice is still good and the theology is quite rich and helpful for us.

The letter begins with a prayer – that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will … so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord - that is as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. That is a prayer we have heard before and a call we have heard before – to live a life worthy of Christ, to bear fruit in every good work, and to grow in knowing God. What is new here is the description of that relationship we have with God, and the description of who Jesus is. Verse 12 to 14 say, “God the Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” And then verses 15 to 20 record a classic hymn about Christ – linking Jesus to everything that ever was or will be, placing Christ as the center of the universe and that which holds everything together. It is through Jesus Christ that everything has meaning and purpose – including ourselves, including our church. And that purpose is reconciliation – making peace – putting everything and everyone right with God.

Theologically, this passage is huge. Volumes and volumes of books have been written about this passage – the cosmological nature of Christ, the meaning of life, the purpose of the church, the order of all creation – and so the very meaning and purpose of each of our lives. In short, back to verse 12 and 13, this scripture says there are two different worlds, two different ways of living- the dominion of darkness and the kingdom of light. Because of Jesus love for us and because of what Jesus did for us to show that love, we belong to the kingdom of light. We have been rescued from the darkness. We live in the kingdom of light. We owe our loyalty and allegiance to light not darkness. We are controlled and influenced and shaped by light not darkness, by life not death, by good not evil, by God not the powers of this world. Darkness, death, evil still exist, but they have no power over us. Believe this and live in the light of Christ.

So what does this mean for us? Last week, I talked a little bit about negative thinking and positive thinking. The scripture reminded us to think on positive things – “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” The scripture today is one step further. It encourages us not only to think positively but to act positively. To do – what is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy. To do the right thing – because we are people of God, we live in Christ’s kingdom, and we must do what God wants us to do, what God expects us to do, what God empowers us to do.

Empowers – that’s the key word here. Verse 11 says “You have been strengthened with all power according to God’s glorious might.” We believe we have received the very power of God through the coming of the Holy Spirit. We believe God makes us able to do whatever we are called to do. We believe that power of God is greater than any other power in the entire universe. And yet we are sometimes afraid, often afraid. This scripture passage offers us courage to trust in the power of God, to trust that God has given us power, and to act using that power of God to do “good” in the world. Now that’s some kind of call! It is yours. It is ours as children of God.

We’ve been talking a lot this anniversary season, and rightly so, about our heritage. This scripture passage reminds us that our inheritance includes both the joy of living in God’s presence and the responsibility of living in that kingdom of God. Notice that this kingdom of God is not some future existence. This is not a heaven in the sweet by and by. This inheritance in God’s kingdom, this living in God’s presence, is not in the future after we die, or better said not ONLY in the future. This inheritance is here and now. We live in God’s presence now. We live in the light of the kingdom of Christ now. So we are expected NOW to act like citizens of that eternal realm. We are expected and empowered NOW to live as God’s people – to do the right thing, to share the love of God and the work of Christ. What is that work – it’s spelled out in this passage too. Our call is to forgiveness and reconciliation – making peace as Christ made peace. As we know from Jesus life, that is not a passive peace – that is an active doing of good that sometimes puts you in danger in this world.

Last week, right after I left here, right after I talked about being positive, praying, and trusting in God. Right after that I heard about the shootings in Louisiana. It breaks your heart. Good men and women doing their best to do the right thing, and the darkness of this world overtakes them. That’s just one example. There is a lot of darkness in this world. There is a lot that can take you down and make you despair. This is not new – it was true 2000 years ago when this letter was written. The challenge is to stand up and to continue standing against the powers of darkness. The call is to be the light of Christ in the world, making peace, sharing God’s love wherever possible. The inheritance we share in Christ is not always the easy thing. The inheritance is to work toward reconciliation, to bring people together, to find just solutions, to witness to the light, to shine the light, to bring people into the light of Christ. Because that light is life – and life for all. It’s not about separating people out into light and darkness. It’s not about seeing who is in the kingdom and who is not. It is not about dividing people in any way. If someone tells you that being Christian is about hating anyone they are wrong. Being faithful and living in the light of Christ is about bringing everyone into God’s love – because God’s love is for everyone, Christ’s redemption is for everyone. It is our job to continue Christ’s work of rescuing others from the power of darkness. It is our job to promote forgiveness and reconciliation and peace and justice for all. It is our job to welcome anyone and everyone into God’s presence in light.

Specifically, I don’t know what that means. There are a lot of people with a lot of opinions out there – even in here. And I don’t know that anyone has found a solution – certainly not a political one. Politics today seems to be about who hates the most and shouts the loudest. Don’t get pulled into that darkness. Don’t be fooled by the rhetoric – measure everything by the light of Christ. I believe that as a community of faith, as a church, as individual people of God, we have been given some gifts to help in this world – the scripture calls it the power of God. You have received that power of light. I invite you to imagine solutions. I invite you to pray about ways we can live in the light of Christ and shine that light in the world where we live. I invite you to use the gifts that God has given you to work God’s good in the world. And I invite you, in the days ahead, in the weeks and months ahead, to share your ideas here in this church that together we might live into God’s vision here at First Presbyterian Church, that we might be God’s people living in the world carrying on the good work of others, that we might share in the inheritance of the saints in the light of Christ. This to the glory of God.