

Pentecost 8
July 10, 2016

"The Gospel Is Bearing Fruit All Over the World"

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

On the Fourth of July Susan and I had an opportunity to view the fireworks at Pismo Beach. We debated whether to go because of the cool weather, the fog rolling in and the large crowds that were expected. How happy we were we made the choice to go. The sky was clear, the weather was comfortable and the fireworks were spectacular. Even the crowd was well behaved. We were thankful to not miss this experience and the time we had together.

Have you seen the fireworks lately? I am not talking about the fireworks on Fourth of July but the glorious power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is growing and expanding through the world. What Paul wrote the Christians in Colosse is true for Christians of every age. "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing." I know it has been another rough week for us in this country with the recent shootings in Dallas. These are not good times in our world and in this country. There are problems in the Christian church. But still in spite of all these problems, the life saving message of Jesus Christ our Savior is bearing fruit in the lives of people all over the world. It is bearing fruit in your life and mine as we gather here for another worship service. We cannot miss seeing this.

This morning we want to speak to you on this message, **"The Gospel Is Bearing Fruit Over All the World."** It bears fruit in us and it bears fruit through us.

The Gospel bears fruit in us

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse from a prison cell in Rome. **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints.”** Paul is privileged to have with him in Rome the very man who has brought the message of the gospel to the Christians in Colosse. His name was Epaphras, a man who was there with the Pau and a man who was called a faithful minister of Christ. He brought Paul the good news of the growth of the gospel in the lives of these dear Christians. He also raised the concern that these Christians were being led away by false teachers who wanted to place more emphasis on Christ as a life couch rather than a Savior who shed his blood for them on the cross. Something similar is happening in churches today.

Even though Paul is a prisoner in Rome he is so thrilled and so thankful to hear what has happened in the lives of these people. He is not exaggerating when he says, “I always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” He is so thankful for the faith these people have and the love they show to their fellow believers in Christ. As I worked on this sermon this past week I kept thinking to myself, “I want to be more like the Apostle Paul. I want to be thankful for every opportunity there is for the life saving message of Jesus our Savior to enter into the lives of people. Do we allow the problems of life in the country, in our personal lives and even in the church to loom up so large that we fail to see the power of the gospel changing the lives of people as Paul did?”

Paul is so happy for these Christians because he has heard first hand from Epaphras that these people share the same hope of glory that he had as a prisoner for Christ. He writes to them about, “the faith and love that spring up from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth.” These people no longer believed that you had to bury your dead with a coin on one eye that they could use to pay the boatman over the river Styx in the transmigration of souls. They believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin and they believed in a bodily resurrection from the dead. Their hope is built on a treasure stored up for them in heaven. This hope fueled their faith and their love for one another. The same thing is happening right now in the lives of our fellow Christians all over the world. Because the gospel has borne fruit in your life you can joyfully say “heaven is my home.”

Paul is so thankful because he could see firsthand how the message of peace with God through Jesus was proclaimed in a place like Ephesus and then taken by a man named Epaphras to the Christians in Colosse. Paul was not exaggerating when he wrote, “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood it.” Let’s remember that as a prisoner in Rome Paul has been able to witness to Roman guards about Jesus. In his letter to the Philippians he says that almost the whole Palace Guard has come to hear the message of the gospel. Some have estimated that by the time of the Apostle John’s death around 100 AD there were over half a million Christians in the Roman Empire.

Let me tell you about my sister Karen. She recently attended the WELS Lutheran Women’s Mission Society convention near Chicago. These conventions have well over a thousand in attendance. She was so excited to hear about all the opportunities given to us to proclaim the gospel. I want to remember what she said and what Paul writes here about the spread

of the gospel, especially when we hear so much bad news.

One man recently told me he has stopped attending church because he has become so disappointed with Christians who say they believe in Jesus but don't live up to what they believe in their daily lives. Surely Paul experienced lots of problems in the churches but he kept the right balance as he thought of how the message of the gospel was bearing fruit in the lives of people.

As long as this world stands the risen Lord and Savior will provide people in his churches who are willing to give their lives so the message of Christ's death and resurrection can bear fruit in the lives of people. **"Your learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit."** Just as ancient cities like Colosse had conduits and aqueducts to bring fresh water into the city, the Lord uses people to bring the gospel to us. Think of the people like Epaphras who have brought the life saving gospel into your life. Think of how the Lord will use people like you and me to bring this message to others. Parents are still leading their children to Jesus in these last days just as my parents lead me to Jesus when I was a little child. Faithful pastors are still leading people to the cross. Friends are telling their friends about a loving shepherd who came to bring lost sheep into his loving arms. There is so much for which to be thankful.

Hear now the message of the gospel as Paul presents it to us so beautifully in verses 12-14. **"giving thanks to the Father, who 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."** See the tears come to the eyes of Paul as he shares how Jesus also rescued him. He says, "he rescued us." Paul never lost sight of how lost and hopeless his life was without Christ. He once lived under the control of darkness as he foolishly believed his fanatical zeal for the Jewish faith could save him from his sin. Then he came to know Jesus, the Savior, his Lord and God who had come to rescue him. Conquering kings would capture people from other countries and make them slaves. Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, comes to rescue us from the dominion of darkness into which we were born. He rescues us by the redemption price he paid for our forgiveness. Now we are saints of God, living in the kingdom of light, destined for eternal glory. That's the message of the gospel for which we thank God every day.

The Gospel bears fruit through us

General Douglas MacArthur once gave a speech to the graduates of West Point that had the stirring words, "The Corps, the Corps, the Corps!" Christians have a stirring theme that unites them together, "The Gospel! The Gospel! The Gospel!" This life saving message of Christ alone bears fruit in our lives and also bears fruit through us.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you, and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God." I want to be filled with God's will. I want

to know more and more of how much God wants me to be his own dear child through Jesus his Son. I want this knowledge of God's will and his desire for me to be his child to so fill my life that I am moved deeply to live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way possible. Day in and day out specially chosen soldiers guard the tomb of the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. They walk 21 steps in 21 seconds, turning precisely, day in and day out, in the worst possible storms. So we walk every day of our lives to live a life worthy of our Savior who gave his life for us and raised himself from the dead. I want my life to reflect the message of the gospel that saved me. "You are writing the gospel a letter each day, by that deeds that you do and the words that you say."

Who is capable of such a noble task? I find no strength in myself but all the strength I need in the Lord. Paul prays **"Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."** It takes great patience and endurance to be a guard at the tomb of the unknown soldier. It takes even greater patience and endurance to be a soldier of the cross. Who is up for such a noble task and honor? You are and so am I because of who are serving. Our God is an awesome God who will strengthen you with his glorious might. He has called you to proclaim the gospel to every creature. He who calls is faithful. He will enable. He will give you strength as Paul confessed so nobly, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Thank God the gospel is bearing fruit all over the world. That's the message we need to remember when we face hard times as a nation, as a church and in our personal lives. Amen.