We Proclaim Him

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
Seminary Sunday Bible Study
Colossians 1: 21-29

Introduction

We proclaim Him (Christ, v.28). Proclaiming Christ is the purpose of Paul and the entire Christian Church, in his time and ours. But we live in a culture that often seems disinterested, sometimes hostile to the wondrous and mysterious message of Jesus Christ. We shouldn’t be surprised, Jesus warned us of persecution for His Name’s sake (e.g., Matthew 5:10-12; 10:17-42).

The Colossian Christians were struggling in a culture that was against their Christian faith. While they may not have been suffering physical persecution at the time Paul wrote them this short letter, there were strong social pressures to add various “philosophical improvements” to their beliefs in Christ. While we don’t know a lot of details about “proto-Gnostic” influences that were rampant in their culture, in many ways they may have been somewhat similar to the pressures we feel today in our American culture, e.g., “‘Tolerate’ everyone’s beliefs”, “Surely Jesus is not the only way to approach and worship God”, “Let me tell you about the revelation I had that goes beyond Scripture”.

And while Paul is teaching the Colossians how to proclaim Christ in their philosophical Gentile setting, he may also be answering some of the questions about life raised for Jews in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. The author of Ecclesiastes comes to the conclusion that everything is vanity, including wisdom and work/toil (see, for example, Eccl 2: 13-21). This is similar to the modern philosophy of existentialism, which proclaims that since humans are (according to evolutionary theory) the outcome of random chance, then it follows that life is meaningless and vanity. But Paul proclaims that Christ and His resurrection reveal “the mystery which was hidden from the ages” and now gives meaning, true wisdom, and purpose to our work in Him.

The Text

In Colossians 1: 1 Paul identifies himself as an “apostle” (one who is sent by and with the authority of the sender) of Jesus Christ. In 1:2-14 He gives thanks for the Colossian Christians and for his friend Epaphroditus (“our dear fellow servant”) who had apparently been the evangelist who started their congregation. In 1:15-20 Paul proclaims the ‘great hymn’ about Christ. In it he reveals that Christ is fully God, the Creator of all things, as well as fully human, the Head of the Church and the firstborn from the dead. Paul also proclaims that Christ has reconciled all things unto him, having made peace through the blood of his cross.

Read 2: 21-23 – Many who have been Christians since they were baptized as infants find the first part of v. 21 difficult. They cannot remember a time that they were “alienated and hostile” toward God. Even some adult converts would not describe their pre-Christian life as “hostile” to God. Yet all can readily admit that we are guilty of “evil
deeds” (and words and thoughts) that separate us from the holy God, creator of the universe. But Paul proclaims that Christ has now reconciled us (made us friends again with God), making us holy, unblemished and blameless, calling us to continue to trust in this wondrous Gospel. Paul has become a servant/minister of this Gospel.

Read 2: 24-26 – Christ’s death and resurrection brought about full reconciliation for believers with God, yet the proclamation of this message continues to bring persecution and affliction on Christ’s body, the Church. Paul, who was in prison for the sake of the Gospel when he wrote this letter, rejoices to be worthy of suffering for this message. Discuss times that class members felt persecuted for their faith in Christ (even though our “persecution” in North America pales in comparison to some of our Christian brothers and sisters on other continents and in previous centuries). In retrospect, can they “rejoice” in their afflictions?

Notice again how Paul describes himself as a servant of God and His Word, chosen for this purpose: “To make the Word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints”.

Read 1: 27-29….. Paul was toiling in this proclamation of the Gospel, “warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom” and “struggling with all his energy” (Note the Ecclesiastes themes) for the Colossians (see also 2:1) even though he had never directly visited them. How do you think that your pastor (and/or other pastors you’ve known) has struggled for you and your congregation(s)?

God has provided Paul, the other apostles, and pastors and other church workers throughout the generations. How, in our LCMS circles, does He continue to raise up pastors and other church workers to preach, warn, teach, baptize, and keep parish members from being “captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world” (see 2:8)

What special struggles, challenges and concerns do you think pastors have today? What special struggles, challenges and concerns do you think seminarians have today? How does, and can, our congregation help seminarians?