

*Act Like It!***Hosea 11:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11**

This week we continue in the Epistle to the people at Colossae. In this 3rd Chapter, the Pauline writer continues to try to help keep members of the early church loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many early Christians, unsure of the future, were attracted to a variety of false teachings. Some claimed that individuals could gain special knowledge of future salvation. Others argued about the physical and spiritual state of Jesus. Others disagreed about who could be a part of the early church. As Jesus did not return within a few years of his resurrection and Ascension, there was increasing uneasiness about the future.

Church members today face similar uneasiness. It has been many centuries, and Christ has not returned. Warnings of terrorism, economic downturns and failures around the world make us uneasy. There is not one of present today who can say with any confidence what the future holds in either our personal or professional lives. We are looking, no, searching for some good news. Those of us gathered in this room and others like it, look to the gospel for some good news about the future and some insight into where we might look to find direction. However, there are many in our community and world who do not bring themselves to these rooms of sanctuary and light. Where do they turn for guidance and hope?

Colossians 3 provides us with some direction. It helps us realize that part of our future is hidden from us by God. We cannot see the whole picture. According to Colossians 3, our new life is "hidden with Christ in God." The verb tense in the Greek indicates what we know to be true, that the new life that God has accomplished for us in the past and will make clear in the future has not totally been revealed to us in the present. That can be frustrating when we are trying so desperately to figure out what comes next in our lives. However, let me remind you that there is freedom in not knowing and it takes some of the pressure from us to know the future and have all the answers. God has given us a great gift. God is at the helm of this boat called life and we can lay back, kick our shoes off, and feel the breeze as we sail through life, with God at the helm.

While God guides and sustains us, how God's providence and our actions interact is one of life's mysteries of faith. The problem is not with us. It is our inability to figure out God's plan that keeps us unsure about the future. The author of Colossians explains that God has hidden a part of the future from us. Thus, we have to rely upon God in faith. We have to wait. We have to be patient.

Shortly after I began ministry here last August I began praying for God's guidance and direction as I served in this place. As I learned more and more about the church and the people, I also realized that if this church was to be viable into the future, we must do something to distinguish First Presbyterian Church of Thomasville from all the others scattered throughout this community. As I learned more about Mark and the rules that had to guide his life, I wondered if God could be calling this congregation to begin an alternate worship service designed especially for those who could not attend traditional worship. I wondered aloud to the Session and to others. I talked with Mark. I talked with the Davidson County Sheriff's Department and to the officer who maintains the

offender's registry. We discussed options that might be open to us. At first there was excitement around the idea. Then one road block, then another, and another.

Someone asked me a month or so ago if I had lost interest in that idea. I responded "no, however, my experience has been that God will make the way clear if it is the right path. If the way is not clear, I must wait upon God. I did not stop. I continued to pray, asking God to make it clear to me. And then, Mark called to say that the Supreme Court had ruled that the State of North Carolina could not deprive him of his freedom to practice his religion, as well as others. I, we had God's answer.

I am still certain God is calling this church to a specific ministry in this community. I am still waiting for God to guide me and us. And I was praying when Sue Hunter called to say Carole Huff had an idea for the Fun Folks and First Presbyterian Church. Some are concerned that as few as we are in number, we cannot have 2 events 2 weeks a part. I say to you all, we prayed for Gods guidance. God is sending answers to our prayers. God sees the bigger picture and knows the end result. We MUST step out in faith to do what God sends our way. If we are not going to follow Gods guidance, then why pray? Why go through the motions if we have no faith in God?

The author of Colossians argues with the early Christians that they should relinquish their previous, unholy behaviors and act holy for the sake of the new relationship they have been given in Christ. "Set your minds on things above." That is hard to do considering all the distractions of this world.

Distractions and impatience are problems in the churches of today and First Pres is one of them. You see, if we are not careful, the lack of certainty of the details - not knowing all the particulars - of God's ultimate plan can become an excuse not to follow the part of God that we DO know.

This passage ends with the words "Christ is all and in all." The early church needed to be reminded to look for the Christ in each other. Many early Christians found it harder to see their spiritual connections than to see their differences. I often wonder how we evolved to see the negative before we see the good in a person. It is the nature of some to see the faults and not see the assets. The early church faced differences between Jews and Gentiles, barbarians and Scythian, slaves and free.

We face divisions today that seem to be growing greater. Divisions along ethnic, social, racial, gender, political, military, familial, and geographic lines are more pronounced than ever. "Christ is all and in all." That is a broad statement. It makes all the difference. If Christ is in all of us, then we all are guided at some level by the same Spirit, larger than us. If Christ is in all of us, then we are all searching for Gods revealed direction together.

Our faith in Jesus Christ unifies and unites all believers. Christ is not far away. Christ is in the hearts of all of us. Our actions can be holy because God can make them holy. We should not think of God being so far off, so removed from our presence that it makes no difference to God how we act or IF we act. Our actions should flow from a place of gratitude for God's gift in Jesus Christ. Thankful for God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ, we show love and grace to others, because God is in us, right?

Dave Weber writes of his classmate, pastor and author, Stu Weber: Growing up, Weber developed a temper, which blossomed in high school and college. And then Weber went into the military, which did nothing to curb his temper or develop his relational skills. Early in Weber's ministry, he stopped playing church-league basketball because his temper kept flaring, embracing himself and the church. A decade passed. Weber thought the Lord had cured his flashes of temper and that he had actually grown. However, his youngest son made the high school varsity basketball team and Weber began living his life again through his son. Weber terrorized the referees. On one occasion, seated in the second row, Weber wound up on the floor level with no recollection of how he got there. He received nasty letters from church members, who, he said now "we're absolutely right." But then he got another note, "Stu I know your heart. I know that's not you. I know that you want to for Christ and his reputation. And I know that has not happened T these ball games. If it would be helpful to you, I'd come to the games with you and sit beside you.

The letter was from one of his accountability partners. Stu later shared that this partner had saved his life. He saw the letter as an invitation, a gracious extension of truth. According to Stu, "He assumed the best and believed in me."

When we love others we believe in them and hope the best for them, even when they fail. We want the best for them, like God wants the best for each and every one of us - because God is in our hearts and we are extensions of God in the world. That's why we act the way we do..... Or is it? Do you go through each day filled with thanksgiving for what God has done and is doing for you? In that spirit of thanksgiving, do you act with love, forgiveness and grace? In other words, Do You Act Like one that God loves?