

Sermon Draft

Text: Colossians 1:13–20

Sermon: “Go in Peace”

The Last Sunday of the Christian year is a day of awe and glory. The vision of blessedness vividly painted in the Beatitudes on All Saints’ Day is here taken up into the consummation of all things at the return and judgment.

The blessed of the Lord *“shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him”* (Malachi 3:17–18).

When the wood is finally dry the distinction between the unrepentant thief reviling Christ (23:39) and the penitent thief seeking Christ’s mercy (23:42) shall be made known throughout the earth as the distinction between *“the righteous and the wicked.”*

Our life in Christ is a strange one because it depends entirely on someone other than ourselves. Everything else in life depends partly on you and partly on others in some mixture.

Our upbringing is partly our father's and our mother's doing and partly our reaction to what they did or left undone. Our education is partly our teachers' doing and partly our acceptance or ignorance or rejection of what they taught.

All mixtures of someone else's performance, laziness, knowledge, or ignorance with our own performance, laziness, knowledge, and ignorance make it seem as if life really does depend on us and how others feel or think about us.

If we like ourselves and others like us, then we must be a good person, worthwhile, not as bad as some others say. If we don't like ourself, even if others like us then we must be a bad person, pointless, useless, a cosmic mistake.

But Christ and the life he gives changes everything. He does not mix his efforts with ours and wait to see how things turn out. Christ instead makes our whole life depend wholly upon him and his eternal resurrection life. So, if we ask ourselves or if someone asks us who we are, we don't have to indulge in pride or despair, in boasting or self-loathing. If we know who Jesus is and what he's done for us, then we truly know ourselves.

We say that because of Jesus and what he has done and who he is for us, we are delivered by Christ, we are created for Christ, and we are at peace through his blood. Our lives and identity are determined by Jesus, who he is and what he's done.

Who we are in Christ is not only unlike every other kind of assessment we or others might make of ourselves. It is also not something we can take for granted, because there was a time when we were not in Christ. As Paul says elsewhere, we “*were by nature children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:3), born in original or inherited sin, our genetic disease of opposing God and exalting ourselves above him and everyone else.

It's that realm of idolatry, rebellion, and unending miseries in this life and the life to come that Paul designates in our text as the “*domain of darkness*” (v 13). A “*domain of darkness*” is a place where darkness has its way. The “*domain of darkness*” is dark because people cannot see their way to the truth; they cannot perceive what they should perceive about the Lord and about themselves. They grope, they stumble, they are the “blind leading the blind” to destruction because they have no better advice or example to offer than their own impaired stumbling.

Sin is dark because we live in it thoughtlessly, carelessly, recklessly, stumbling and tumbling to our own and others' destruction.

The “*domain of darkness*” is also dark because it is precisely where Satan holds sway. He relies on darkness, both the darkness of night, when sin crouches at our door so close to us, and the darkness of the heart, where we do not even understand the things that we do or say wrongly. Satan likes darkness because it affords him room to work. He can work when we don't confess our sin. He can work when we spend our time and energy hiding our sin. Darkness is his favorite place to be especially when he's there with us.

From that domain, that rule, that power, that influence Jesus has delivered us. He is a man of light, born in the light of the star of Bethlehem and risen on the third day when the light began to spread on the earth. He rules the darkness, too, but in the world to come we will not need sun or moon to be lights in the heavens, because the brightness of Christ will be such that he himself shall be our light. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

When he claims us he transfers us like a man moving from one country to another. ***“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son”*** (v 13). In the old country, there were accustomed ways of acting and thinking and speaking. Those old, dark ways seemed natural, comfortable, easy, and familiar, apart from Christ.

But Jesus transferred us to a new country of light. It may not feel natural, comfortable, easy, or familiar unless we have been with him a very long time. That’s okay. The most important thing is that he has transferred us here to light and life in his kingdom.

That means we are delivered or, in other words, that we have “redemption,” a state of freedom because someone else paid for us to get out of slavery. In Jesus, ***“we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”*** (v 14). And what did Jesus do to redeem us? He paid the debt of sin we owed so that we could have the ***“forgiveness of sins,”*** He paid to win us back from slavery. We are redeemed. We are transferred. We are delivered because of him!

Why should he redeem us? Paul tells us that we are who we are in Christ only because he is who he is. He is not only your Redeemer giving the forgiveness of sins. He is also the Head of creation, its divine king, and he shall have what is his. ***“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together”*** (vs 15–17). We were made by God for better things. We were made to live under Christ’s gracious reign in his kingdom.

Long before we ever thought or did anything, long before our parents thought of having children, indeed from all eternity, Jesus Christ is the image, of the invisible God. We can’t see the Father’s face; no man ever has or shall but we can see Christ. We can’t know the Father’s will or heart unless we know Christ. Jesus is the only way of salvation; he is the only access we have to the eternal Father. We cannot come to the Father except through Jesus, the eternal Son. He was the instrument of creation; ***“all things were created through him,”*** (v 16).

“He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (v 18).

So, we are delivered by Christ because we were created for Christ. So, too, we are now at peace. ***“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”*** (vs. 19–20).

Maybe you have nodded along until now. Maybe you were thinking that all of this sounded good. It really would be great if we could locate the worth of our life in the worth of Christ.

But “at peace”? Seriously? We have all of us trespassed against others as they have trespassed against us. But because of Jesus and his work and his ways, we are not a captive, we are not a slave, we are not the tool or the instrument of all those trespasses, all those sins, all those dark things. We are redeemed; we are delivered! We are forgiven; we are set free; we are cleansed; we are healed.

We are redeemed and are at peace because of Jesus’ blood! Through the power of his blood, we have peace, peace between us and God. A peace the world cannot give.

Your whole life is not wrapped up in how well you've done or how poorly you've done, how others have done or how poorly they have done at this or that or the other thing. Your whole life hung entirely on the death Jesus died and now rests entirely on the life Jesus lives.

We have peace with God because God has made peace. We have peace with man because God is at peace. That is why I bless you with peace at the end of Holy Communion and the end of the Divine Service. I'm not offering you a chance at peace. I am proclaiming the peace Jesus has won for you by his blood and by his cross and by his resurrected life.

So go in peace. Our God is reconciled to us. We are free from sin. Go in peace. You are free from the darkness sin brought into your life, and you live now in his light. Go in peace. You are alive forevermore in Christ. Go in peace. Your faith has saved you because you trust in Christ alone. Go in peace. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain, whether you die or live because you belong to Christ, and he is all in all, Redeemer, Creator, Peacemaker, to whom is glory now and always.

Amen!