

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, August 3, 2025
Guest Preacher: Margaret McGugan
“Your life is hidden with Christ” Colossians 3: 1-11

Image receiving a Facebook Friend suggestion.

Image that Facebook thinks that you need another friend or that it knows who your friend should be.

If you have a Facebook account, you already know the steps to unravel this new friend's hidden identity.

You are cautious when the given name “Paul” appears in the name box with no photo.

Paul could be several people you know.

You hesitate...looking for some connection to this new friend suggestion. Could he be an old high school friend or maybe a quaint friend from a past encounter.

Do you add, or do you remove Paul as a friend?

Accept or decline.

You open another box which gives you more information.

Name: Paul of Tarsus.

Education: Pharisee, a Roman soldier, a tentmaker.

Places lived: Asia Minor.

Speaks fluent Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek.

Mutual Friends: too numerous to list.

Vocation: appointed by God

Someone appointed by God, who speaks 3 ancient languages fluently and is attributed to writing 13 letters out of 27 in the Epistles and is still remembered in the church today, should have our attention.

And why would Paul of Tarsus or the Apostle Paul or Saint Paul -- why does his name appear on our Facebook account?

Perhaps more importantly, why are we reading part of his letter this morning in a modern-day church?

We could be out golfing or doing something else instead of hearing about Paul again.

Is there something in this letter that can give us assurance on how to live a fuller life in today's chaotic world?

From the first century to the twenty-first century, I believe there is a connection to Paul's letter whether a friend or a controversial figure by church goers.

Whether you believe all Paul teaches or only a sampling, the church today is a result of Paul's missions, of Paul's dying conviction to Christ and he writes about how our lives with Christ can be fulfilling.

Human beings need to be reminded of their follies. As we are aware, we as a people are indecisive and at times erratic. It does not matter what century we live in.

We, as congregants of the Presbyterian Church in Canada are not much different from the congregation of the Colossian church in Asia Minor.

They have encountered immigration problems; slavery; corrupt political agendas; foreign languages and ancient philosophies and beliefs. They are fearful of ridicule and persecution as members of the Jesus' movement.

They are questioning the validity of Christ because He has not yet returned and no one, not even Paul, can give a concise answer.

They are listening to the extremists in their community who speak of human power and greed which contradicts Christ's teachings.

They may be confused and doubting some of Paul's writings especially when Paul talks of dying of your old life and being renewed in a new one.

It seems this other worldly language is more frightening than comforting.

Paul lists things that are of earthly power, things that temporarily remove them from Christ -- fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed.

He talks about the wrath of God to the disobedient.

Confused and doubting, they may be starting to think if the Christian life is so stringent, so restricted to enjoy the earthly things, why follow Christ.

Yet, Paul does not stop writing to them.

No matter whether he is in prison, he writes, and he sends out his devout friends to deliver the message.

If anything, Paul is not writing to scold.

In fact, Paul thanks God on their behalf- encouraging them to abide by what they have been taught about Jesus Christ.

'To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.' Col 1;2

This first century church is living in uncertain and inundated times with controversial voices speaking inundated language around them.

Their hearts know what is right, but their minds are wandering from the Lord. Some have left the church for fear of persecution, yet Christ has not left them.

During this time of uncertainty, they try to distinguish between truth and deceit.

They want to hang onto the threads of faith especially when their world is going crazy with dangerous extremists and Roman emperors.

Paul's third letter comes to strengthen their faith.

He is asking them to think beyond what they see and hear.

He gives them another vision of who Christ is and how Christ will protect them after this earthly life.

If we listen carefully, Paul writes describing the nature of Christ.

'Seek the things that are above; seek where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.'
(Col.3:1)

We believe as Christians, that the nature of Christ is both fully human and fully divine. But this doctrine was written in the future, after Paul's time.

So, Paul had to use other images, other language to convey the nature of Christ to an agrarian people.

I wonder if this image of Jesus Christ left them perplexed and more confused than ever.

Seek the things that are above; seek where Christ is.

This otherworldly language does not stop the urge to seek earthly things.

Paul knows that the Colossian congregation has its faults. He knows they will continue to live their lives in temptation.

He knows they will question his authority especially now that Christ has not returned as promised.

But Paul also knows through personal experience that

Christ is real. Christ is authentic. Christ is in God.

And from this conviction to Christ in God, there is a glory to come from God through the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Paul's strong conviction to Christ does not stop people from misrepresenting Christ in the world during the 1st century or the 21st century.

But this Christ-like conviction does give us another option to seek-- when we have obscured Christ's name.

When we have walked away from Christ's teachings.

Christ gives us something good to hold onto, to bear witness to, because the truth is that our life is hidden with Christ.

It is protected from evil ways if we wish to follow Christ.

A commentary I read gives us this to ponder... Fear not, for Christ has shown us the future by His resurrection.

Perhaps Christ's resurrection is the authority for what it means to live our life hidden with Christ in God because we as believers understand that Christ's glory will be revealed with his in the last day.

Yet this glory is hidden from our view. It has not yet come.

Figuratively, Paul came to understand that to carry this future idea of resurrection – this rising above, this hidden life with Christ is also to carry a trust with and in Christ and God when our lives are confronted with opposition or doubt or fear, pain or suffering.

Perhaps, we need to understand that God has accomplished the future for us.

Christ was raised from the dead and sits on the right hand of God the Father, so, we need not worry about death. Our old sinful lives have already died with Christ on the cross.

This now leaves us free in the present moment-- to be renewed in the knowledge of our Creator on our spiritual journey.

We are assured that Christ is in us and with us, beneath and above us. And no matter how many times we wander from Christ, Christ never wanders from us.

Christ shows us by example how to clothe ourselves with compassion, mercy, goodness, true humility, gentleness, and patience throughout the Gospel stories.

These Christ-like qualities are not always visible; but are hidden in us.

We need to exemplify these good behaviours more often.

But in the heat of the moment, sometimes bad behaviours give us authority to be angry, or hateful or demeaning. They allow us to lord over another even for a moment.

But these bad behaviours perish quickly when we allow the face of Christ to appear before us. When the heart of love emanates from us.

May we not forget that these human, earthly vises are the ones Christ took to the cross.

These are the ones he took personally--- when he himself was bruised and shamed by human anger, hatred and misjudgement.

But the cross was not the end, but the beginning of Christ's life through the Holy spirit.

This is the Christ we believe in. This is the Christ we understand Him to be. This is the Christ we can choose to become like. The figure of love and understanding and compassion.

This is what is hidden in our life with Christ.

That Christ is all and is in all.

Our lives are fragile and deserving of the best God has to offer us.

We have a choice to make...do we accept Christ as a forever friend or do we temporarily remove him to accommodate our earthly wants, and desires.

This third letter Paul writes, is to give us good options to live a full and gratifying life. He gives us hope in an otherwise wanting world.

Paul prayed for the Colossian church and his prayers remain with us today.

'To God's holy people in Colossae and London, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.' Col 1;2

He writes to teach us about a future that we cannot see with our eyes, but one that God has already accomplished in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

After hearing Paul intentions to the Colossian church and to us today, after understanding Paul's true intentions and honesty about how our life is hidden with Christ in God, what do we do about this Facebook Friend request?

Do we add this friend or remove?

Accept or decline.

The choice is ours to make.

Amen.