

**Sermon on Colossians 2:13-17 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran – New Ulm, MN 6/3/18 – Pastor Scharf**

Sometimes we close our eyes when danger approaches – when we are scared, when we don't want to see what awful thing is about to happen in life or in a movie, or our body senses something is coming and it is simply reflex. Saul closed his eyes, maybe from reflex at such a bright light, but maybe consciously because he feared what was coming. We know him best as "Paul," the author of 13 letters of the New Testament, God's apostle to the Gentiles, the great missionary and preacher of God's Grace. But none of that had happened yet as Saul lay on the ground. He fell when a heavenly light flashed around him (Acts 9). He heard Jesus say, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" Saul had been breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, and wasn't satisfied to hunt down Christians in just Jerusalem. He was on the road to Damascus on the hunt. Jesus brought the hunting party to an end. In an amazing act of mercy and grace, Jesus did not crush Paul and send him to hell, but called Paul to serve him by taking the gospel to the Gentiles and to suffer for his name.

Many years later, after his mission journeys, Paul was imprisoned for over four years for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote to the congregation at Colossae to encourage them in their faith and to help them fight the heresies and false doctrines which lurk within their own sinful hearts and they were hearing from other religious voices. Some advocated certain rites, rituals, diets and days as true higher Christianity. This can be a temptation for us too. Hypocrisy with self-righteousness or also despair on the flipside of the coin always simmer in our sinful nature waiting to boil over. Paul wants all of us to:

**Remember how this all went down, so that you never forget how you have been brought up.**

*Colossians 2:13-17 - "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon*

*celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*

After someone has been a Christian for little while, God’s Word and especially his law as summed up in the 10 commandments starts to shine a light on what they see around them. Rightly, it shows the great sinfulness and immorality of the land in which we live, and in those around us. Quickly our minds race to how to reform society or to withdraw from it. This usually ends up in demanding unbelievers to conform to what God’s laws say without first converting their hearts. Or we build up rituals, practices and walls which remove us from society and interacting with others. Then after a while of this with well-built walls, the Law looks at our sinful minds which just expected that we were living good enough lives and turns the microscope on our hearts. Even a half-way focused light exposes our own failures at not only God’s moral law, but against our own rituals and traditions. Paul lifts us out of this quagmire of justification by comparison and salvation or despair by self-made works to **remind us how this all went down so that we never forget how we have been brought up.**

You were dead. What can a dead person do? Nothing. But yet we don’t look dead or feel dead. We can choose to wear shoes or sandals, to agree with someone or disagree with someone. We might even say we are free in our will. But Paul says, “Not spiritually.” You were spiritually dead, bound in chains in your spiritual will. In other places he describes it as *blindness*, even *hostility towards God and his Son*. Paul knew a thing or two about that. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, even calls us by nature “*uncircumcised*” in regards to our sinful flesh. We don’t have a free will in spiritual matters. By nature we are spiritually dead.

That’s when *God made you alive with Christ*. “*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross*. We were dead in sin – born of sinful parents with sin inherited, and we’ve added to that rap sheet every day of our lives. And God took us, sinners – dead to the core, and made us alive with Christ. *He forgave us all our sins*. Past tense. Fact. Now that may seem too simple. Ain’t nothin’ free in life, right? No, it wasn’t free and it wasn’t simple. God sent his only begotten Son to take on flesh, live a perfect life which God would deposit in our accounts, give up his life for me and you on a cross so that our sins, our guilt, our shameful deeds would be forgiven. And on that cross on which Jesus died, not only were our sins forgiven, but Paul pictures it this way – every accusation and ledger that our failures, debts,

and offenses warranted was nailed to that cross. Jesus destroyed it. Write down everything you know to be wrong about you and your failures, sinfulness, and shame, and that is only a fraction of the reality. Yet the whole ledger, the whole of it, has been nailed to the cross. It's gone. All that caused our soul unrest is removed and we have peace with God and God's peace within.

Through the message of this good news, the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart, turned the lights on, rebirthed you in your baptism, made you alive with Christ. He took what was dead and made it alive. My wife's great great grandpa Gottlob was born lifeless and gray, set aside for burial after he was delivered. But then the doctor looked over and noticed shallow breath come to his lungs. God had given this little baby life. He was named "Gottlob" which means "God's love." The Holy Spirit has done even better with our sin-dead souls. But we can each bear that name, "God's love." Paul includes himself – "*He forgave us all our sins.*" You are included too.

And what's more, Paul tells us, "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*" Every debtor who had a claim to you has nothing that will stick. It's already been paid. Easter morning is heaven's mortgage burning celebration. Jesus' cross and empty tomb are the day the cell doors opened and you were acquitted, pardoned and justified. The devil, the world and our own sinful natures took their best shot at Jesus – inciting Rome against him, inciting the Jewish nation against him, mocking him on the cross, and even staffing the tomb with soldiers. But in each of these things Jesus' took the victory. Jesus was tempted. He stood firm in trust and on a right understanding of God's Word. Jesus was crucified, but he spoke with full control and with words of mercy, not hatred or curses. He spoke words of work completed and victory – "*It is finished.*" He awoke and descended to hell to show Satan and all those who rejected him that he is not dead, but alive. His empty tomb spoke proof of all God's promises. His ascension shows us his power to rule and his return will be glorious. We are freed from sin, from the powers that made us captive to sin. So now what?

Why does Paul even tell them all this beautiful truth? Paul wrote to a Christian congregation. Their pastor had visited Paul in Rome and told him all the wonderful things they were doing and the love they had for one another and the Lord. I think of you as a congregation – the love that is shown, so much of it behind the scenes, the solemn dedication to instructing youth in God's Word in our Lutheran Schools and in our Sunday and Wednesday schools, even entering a building project. I think of the care of souls young and old with so many looking

out for the homebound and the hurting. In this, **Paul reminds you of how this all went down so that you can see how you have been brought up.** Why? By remembering how God saved you, that God is pleased with you because of Christ, it will make your work (whatever you do) a joy as you go to work and serve your neighbor and also your Lord, whether in the factory, outside smoothing out concrete, sitting at a desk, or whatever you do. These truths of forgiveness and peace the Holy Spirit will use to turn you from the sin that entangles you or from the pitfalls of your former life when sin dominated and you felt trapped and overtaken, or intoxicated by sin. God's law and gospel will help you avoid new walls or bringing up old ones to separate yourself from others who are lesser and burden yourself with unnecessary rules and regulations which don't do anything for God. God gives us peace, makes us alive and effective.

Paul speaks of worship days. The Lord wants you at worship and in his Word – not to earn his love or get “Jesus points,” or because a certain day for worship is better than another. He wants you to come so he can tear down your false beliefs and idols, and so that you will know his love better, his forgiveness better, and find comfort, guidance and strength in what he has done for you and will do through you. *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”* You have the reality – Christ, who he is, and all he has done for you. Live. **Paul reminds you of how this all went down, so that you can see how you have been brought up by God in Christ, and so you can really serve him and your neighbor with peace and joy.** Amen.