

Colossians 2:6-15

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Memories

I have a friend who went in search of the meaning of life. He had heard about a great mind that lived in the mountains who he thought could help him, so he sold all of his worldly possessions and went deep into the great smoky mountains seeking out the man who legend said was called "White Hair". After several weeks of searching when he was just about to give up believing he would never understand what the purpose for life was, he stumbled upon a cave in the deepest and darkest part of the woods. He marched into the cave and heard a loud grumble. "What do you want?" the voice called out.

As my friend told it, he bowed down before this imposing man sitting in the cave and whispered "Are you the one they call "white hair?"

The old man chuckled as my friend looked up. He was cleaning his yellow teeth with what appeared to be a piece of bone. "I've not been called that in a long time," he replied "I am retired you know."

“Retired?” my friend asked inquisitively.

“Yes, it gets very tiresome having to make up obscure ways to tell people the meaning of life all the time.”

My friend was taken aback, but said “But, you have helped so many people. You are the wisdom of the mountains; how could you talk this way?”

He stopped picking his teeth, tucked the bone carefully back in the folds of his robe and said “Don’t mind me. I have been doing this for far too long. What is it that you wanted to know?”

My friend hesitated and then sheepishly stated “I wanted to know the meaning of it all and why we are here.”

“Well, that is actually two questions.”

“It is?” my friend questioned.

“Yes,” the old man grumbled “The first, the meaning of it all, is easily answered: The meaning is within, and without, and found when the two are one.”

My friend, amazed, took out his notebook and wrote down every word so he wouldn’t forget. “That is amazing, I get it. And what about the second question?”

White Hair solemnly looked down at the dirty floor of the cave and said “yes, um, why are we here...that is a tougher question...why are we here? Well, I am here because I don’t know my way out of these blasted mountains.”

We are the music makers...we are the dreamers of dreams. This famous quote by the great philosopher Willie Wonka in the 1970’s movie “Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory” was one of the first things that popped into my head as I started preparing for the message this week. It is true, that we often find time to seek out the meaning of it all. From birth, we begin to wonder about what everything means. We assign meaning to every event in our lives. From every birth to every death and everything that happens in between, we seek to find meaning. This search for meaning, makes us who we are, it shapes who we will become and it lets others know we are.

For those of you that have children, this might strike home for you. People who study development in children from birth through adolescence believe that this

search for individual meaning starts from the word “Mine”. They are seeking out things that they own. They are seeking out something they can hold on to. When doing a task, children will often act out saying something like “I can do it myself!” They are seeking that meaning, they are seeking their purpose, they are thinking about making their way in the world. In my estimation this never really stops. In our teenage years, we start to explore who we are, sometimes by doing dumb things. As we get older we begin to try and narrow our scope and focus more on those things that are important to us and to our family as we seek out that identity, that purpose.

In our verse from Colossians this morning, we find ourselves at a crossroads with a set of new believers seeking to understand their purpose. They were breaking free from conventions that they once held very dear, a different set of rules if you will. The believers in Colossae were dealing with people that were indifferent to them, they were trying to spread the good news of Jesus. I can only imagine that they were frustrated, their pleas were potentially falling on deaf ears.

That sounds familiar doesn't it? How often do we seek to help others believe something different than they do currently? You should vote for my political candidate; you should believe what I believe. You should do what I say, you should not buy from that store because something happened once that I didn't like, or the CEO believes something I don't believe. We spend an inordinate amount of time searching for our own meaning by trying to convince others that they don't know their own meaning of it all.

I don't bring this up because I want to lecture or because I think I do it right all the time, I bring this up because Paul and Timothy in this letter to the Colossians tell us how to seek out what we are looking for. They tell us to remember.

They tell us to remember where we came from and they tell us to live faithfully through the powerful source of remembering. He calls on them to remember that they were saved through their baptism, they call to them remember that they are rooted in Christ and that they are built up because of their faith.

Think about the power of memories with me for just a minute. We are connected to each other through memories. Every community we are a part of starts with memories, right down to our family unit. It starts with building memories, from a first date where you go putt-putt golfing and nervously pat your blind date on the

shoulder to let her know you are having a good time, to your first kiss, to your wedding and through all the ups and downs. Everything you do is based on memories. As your family grows, memories grow. You become a part of any kind of an organization, you start building up memories. Even here at Heritage, our church is nothing without the combined memories of the congregation and the people that have been a part of it. Good memories like weddings and youth group events, bad memories like the splitting of the congregation into two churches. They all work together to make us who we are and help us find the meaning of it all.

In our reading this morning, the writers of this letter are not asking the believers in Colossae to simply be bound to things they remember, just like I am not asking you this morning to simply get lost in remembering all the good and bad things that have happened or will happen going forward. This morning I would like you to seek out not just all of your memories, but I want you to focus on those memories that help you find resilience, find power and find your faith anew. You are not going to change the minds of people that are out to hurt you. You are not going to change the minds of people that read the bible in a different way than you do.

When you remember why you are a Christian, when you remember why you are a member of Heritage, it isn't about one event, it isn't about one person, it is about a community of faith, it is about shared memories, it is about remembering that in your baptism you are saved. It is about remembering what brings us all together and makes us one body made up of individuals. As individuals, our memory is faulty, heck, as individuals, we are faulty. But today's reading reminds us that as a group, our collective memory of our baptism and the ways we got here today are overwhelmingly powerful. Look to the people around you this morning, our collective memories make us strong. This morning after this message we are going to sing "Amazing Grace." These are the kinds of memories that I want you to fill yourself with this morning. I once was lost, but now I am found. I was weak, but now I am strong. We are strong with each other.

In the reading this morning, it says that we shouldn't concern ourselves with false prophets or people that seek to make light of the things we believe. Your faith, your spirituality are very individual things, but by coming together as a

community and forming joint memories, we make something more for ourselves...we become bigger than an individual can, our faith is stronger than that of an individual. I caution you though, it is not lost on me that it could be interpreted that people that don't believe what I believe could be construed as false prophets or false teachers. I urge you not to judge, I urge you to live in the grace of Jesus Christ and I urge you live as an example of the forgiveness that was gifted to you in your baptism. Share Joy, Share Love, Create Memories.

When we look back as a community of faith, I pray that someday a future generation of Heritage Church will be able to sing "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun" and be thinking about the love and the memories that were made at Heritage today.

I cannot begin to tell you the meaning of life, it is yours for the making and will be unique to you, but I can pray that you find your way, that you find your purpose and that you are able to connect that purpose to the saving love of Jesus Christ.

Amen