

Christ Is Our Life

“... *Christ is all, and in all*” Colossians 3:11b

As some of you might recall, this past week was VBS at St. Michael’s. It was a real joy to see Emmanuel well represented during this week through participants and volunteers. Again, I cannot convey my thanks enough to our entire congregation for your love, care, support and prayers of this event and VBS in general. This year’s opportunity to team up more intentionally with our sister congregation was a wonderful experience and truly is encouraging as we look forward to more VBS opportunities in the future.

The theme of this VBS was Food Truck Party: On a Roll with God! This exciting theme had a lot packed into it and one of the biggest take home points was that God is trustworthy to provide what we need. This trusting attitude was reinforced by several stories. We were reminded of God’s provision to the Israelites in the desert when He gave them manna in the morning and quail at night. We reflected on how the Lord provided for Elijah, a widow and her son during a severe drought. Another story that we focused on was Jesus feeding 5,000 plus people starting with only five loaves of bread and two fish.

Throughout the week, all the participants and volunteers were reminded that God provided for our needs and there were many neat moments where the youngest to the oldest were united in proclaiming this attitude of trust in God. Yet, if you peeled back a layer or two on the events of this week, you’d also notice how much all of us struggled to live out this attitude of trust and focus consistently. Little ones were getting upset over having to share the gifts God had given. Some of the younger volunteers had to be reminded that the volunteer snack station was for every volunteer not just for them to feast on. There’s no doubt that all of us impacted by VBS this week, from the youngest to the oldest, myself included, at times struggled to maintain an attitude of trust and focus that God would provide for our needs.

While VBS is over for this year, our readings this weekend make it clear that this tension and struggle is something with which we all deal. All three of our readings reveal to us the struggle to trust in and focus on God and His provision. Jesus in our Gospel reading warns against covetousness especially believing that what truly matters in this life is how much we can gain. Solomon, in our first reading, comes from the sobering angle that nothing in this life goes with us and that we ultimately have no say in how those who come after us use what we gained. Paul in Colossians, broadens the depth of this struggle as he links covetousness to idolatry in a list of several other “earthly” things, that erode trust in and focus on God and His provision.

Based on these words this weekend, none of us are exempt from this sinful struggle. Yes, we may not have literal storehouses filled with ample goods for many years, but we all possess this man’s attitude toward God and His gifts. Our attitude quickly shifts from trust and thanksgiving from God’s blessings, to that of greed and misplaced security in what we think we’ve rightfully earned on our own forgetting or at least taking for granted that God was behind all these blessings to begin with! Too often we revert our focus back onto temporal things at the expense of things that are above.

In this consumption culture in which we all live, we all have seen our trust in and focus on God and His provision challenged and eroded, sometimes subtly, sometimes drastically. Maybe these “Covid-times” have revealed our real attitudes toward God and His blessings, as

store shelves grew empty and other supplies were limited, was our trust more in how much extra we could buy for ourselves or in the God would provide what we needed. Perhaps, our trust truly remains in how well we can plan for our lives placing our security in earthly goods and not in the God who gave those goods. How often have we acted as though our life is our own ignoring the fact that it's God who gave us breath?

Friends, the hard truth is that we all have let our guard down and seen covetousness take over our lives and as Solomon clearly tells us, this is a path ultimately destined for despair and meaninglessness. Over and over again, we have focused on gaining earthly, personal treasures for ourselves and not concerned ourselves with being rich toward God. We chase after the wind ignoring the fact that we cannot hold onto it. We so quickly trade our eternal wealth for temporal abundance. We are foolish sinners so forgetful of who has been providing for us all along.

But still into our sinful and foolish state, God's Word comes. **"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God"** (Colossians 3:4). This death of which Paul speaks, is a death that comes from the Law-driven confession that we have put our trust in earthly things over trust in God Himself. It is a death we deserve, but because of Jesus, it isn't a death we die alone. Rather, by God's grace and mercy, we die with Christ. And this truth is our reality through the waters of Baptism where you and I have been connected to Christ's death upon the cross so that our lives of sin have been covered by Jesus and His life of perfection is now ours.

With lives hidden with Christ Jesus, we see things differently. Our lives are no longer driven by greed and discontent. Rather, we choose to let go of those worldly attitudes towards possessions because of how much God has already given us in Jesus. This is a choice we make daily only by the Holy Spirit's ongoing work within us. In and through Jesus, our values shift from prioritizing money, possessions and other earthly gain over everything to prioritizing the mercy, love, forgiveness and life eternal that God has given to us over the temporal gain God has bestowed on us.

This is what it means to be rich toward God! Receiving all that He provides for both our bodies and souls and then sharing what He has provided with our neighbors. Being rich toward God isn't a call for us to deny and not enjoy all God's earthly blessings that He has given. Being rich toward God begins and ends with Jesus. For Jesus is the one who first delivers God's richness to us. Jesus reveals to us that the God who provides earthly blessings actually provides so much more! Jesus has redeemed us and all of creation so that we and all our possessions might serve His eternal purpose in our lives and the lives of our neighbors. Being rich toward God isn't a denial of His gifts or refusal to enjoy them, it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to share what He has abundantly bestowed on each of us.

Fellow stewards of God's gifts, Christ is our life, nothing more and nothing less. For He is all and in all. Our faith is in Him. Our forgiveness, He died and won. Our eternity, He rose and secured. He gives meaning to our earthly life. He guides us to be rich toward God. He leads us to sacrifice with thanksgiving and praise the abundance He provides us for our neighbor. Yes, Jesus is all and in all and He is our life. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan