

Walking in Christ

Colossians 2: 5-12

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**September 23, AD 2018
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Let's pick up a verse we didn't get to talk about much last week. In Colossians 2, Paul is concerned that the young Christians there are getting pulled away from the truth by deceptive teachings. He's concerned that they will wonder if Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for them. To satisfy them. To cleanse them. To give them meaning and purpose. To give them life. Paul wants them to be rooted deeply in the full sufficiency of Christ so that they can flourish in him. False teachings will stunt their growth. Wrong thinking will block their experience of Christ's power. So Paul does what every coach does when some bad habits are creeping into the way the team plays. He takes them back to basics. He takes them back to the beginning. He tells them what's right about them in the very core.

"I rejoice to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ Jesus" (2:5). Paul loved that their belief was strong. As I looked closely at this verse in the original language, I was struck with the unusual word order. More literally rendered, Paul writes that he rejoices in the firmness of "the into Christ faith of you." *The into Christ Jesus faith of you.* That sounds odd to our ears. We don't talk that way and normally Paul wouldn't write that way. We'd just say, "your faith in Christ Jesus." But that normal way of saying makes it seem like faith is something that stays inside of me. It's my personal feeling. It's about my personal beliefs the way I desire them to be. Paul wants to be sure we realize that Christian faith is very different. It's about launching out of myself and into Jesus. Faith *propels* me into Christ. The only faith that's any good is faith that leads me out of myself and into Jesus. It's not just about what I believe, but how I am joined to Jesus by putting my full trust in him. The into Christ Jesus faith of you. Faith is not just a feeling. Faith takes me somewhere. It relocates me. This is the faith by which we drive out of the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of the beloved Son. Real faith launches me in a direction away from my old life and into new life in Christ. It's a constant dynamic. Driving out of my slop towards the Savior.

It's because they have this active, propelling faith into Christ that Paul can urge them to continue in full trust. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (2: 6). Just as you received Jesus, so walk in him. Again, let's look closely at the words Paul chooses. **As you received**

Christ. What does it mean for a person to *receive* Christ? Literally, the word means to accept something that is delivered. I sign a receipt when an overnight letter arrives to confirm that “Yes, you delivered the document. I acknowledge that I have accepted it. I have it now.” We receive guests into our home when we actually open the door and let them in. We know that we have really received grandmother’s recipe for etouffee when we have cooked it the way she cooked it. What she passed down, we are passing on because we made her recipe part of our lives.

So when we receive Christ Jesus the Lord, we are welcoming him into our lives as who he really is. We accept that he is the Savior. I can’t solve my life and I need the one who is the Solution. I receive the one whose very name, Jesus, means, “The LORD saves.” We accept that he is the Lord. I submit my will to your will. I give you the keys, slide over and let you drive. Receiving Jesus is hearing the news of who he is and what he has done and saying, “Yes, I want that. That’s the story I want to direct my life.”

Do you remember how you felt when you first received Jesus as Savior and Lord? Or how you felt when you received him in a new, deeper, fresh way? A wonderful joy flows through us. We feel free. Washed. Energized. Embraced. Forgiven. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. For some people, this is a dramatic conversion following a time of hitting rock bottom. An addiction, a tragic loss, a divorce, a firing. We reach our wit’s end and cry out and find him there. For others, it’s always been part of life. All my days I knew Christ was in me and I am in Christ. But even for those who have received him gently all along, there come the new levels, the crisis points, the stages. I thought I was a good person, a true believer, then I saw what damage I could do, and realized I needed Jesus more than I ever had. Now he’s taken me into a whole new intimacy with him. Or, I had been faith-ing into Christ all my life, but then I felt convicted for habits and actions I had never been aware of before. I had to yield my life anew to his Lordship, and when I did, I felt freedom that I never even knew I was missing. Receiving Jesus brings release, relief, and renewal in a thousand different ways,

So Paul reminds them, as you received Jesus, keep on receiving him. Walk the walk of your life in continuing reliance on Jesus as the heart of your life and the desire of your heart. Keep propelling into Christ by active faith. Paul urges them to sink roots deep into the truth of Christ. Learn who Jesus is. Worship him. Paul urges them to build upon Christ, growing and changing in a life marked by

abounding thanksgiving and ever flowing love for God and others. Live now the way you started back then. With abandon. With commitment. With fervor and joy.

Then comes the warning. “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit.” Once more, Paul’s word choice is important. The word for “take captive” is the same word used for being plundered by pirates at sea. In other words, your faith has propelled you in a journey into Christ. Along the way, watch out for pirates. They want to steal your joy. They want to raid your assurance. They want to capture your freedom, commandeer your ship and throw you off course. Set a watch on your ship. Travel together. And learn what pirates look like. They come in all kinds of popular but deceptive ideas.

I asked three groups I met with this week to write down some of the common deceits that afflict people in our culture today. Their answers were wonderfully insightful. I think we can group these deceits around three words: YOLO, FOMO, and Promo. Let’s look at each of these.

YOLO. You might see this on a T-shirt. Or scrawled on a wall. It means *You Only Live Once*.

YOLO. This life is all there is.
So find your own happiness.
Whatever you believe is good,
Just be authentic
Do what you want to do, right now.
Follow your heart. Wherever it leads.
Because love is never wrong.
No regrets. Go for it.

In other words, I can fill my emptiness by seizing my life now in whatever way looks fulfilling.

FOMO: Fear of Missing Out. Somewhere, somebody is experiencing more of life than I am.

I have to do everything.
My kids have to do everything. They have to have every experience or they will be lacking what is needed for a good life.

We have to go to every event or we will be out of the loop.
We have to travel every place in order to taste all that life has to offer.

I’ve got to have the game, the toy, the equipment, the gadget that everybody wants now or I will be out of it.

I deserve to live my dream.

FOMO makes us restless where we are. It makes us feel lacking even with all we have. We don't realize that "The people in places you dream about going are all dreaming of being somewhere else." We think the solution is in the next thing and we are breathlessly chasing the wind. In other words, I can fill my emptiness by doing and having and experiencing everything that promises me life.

Promo: It's about me.
Sin and Christ are compatible.
Whatever I want is good.
My favorite sins and Jesus are compatible,
Because Jesus is happy when I am happy.
My desires must be satisfied for my fulfillment.
I am helpless to change my desires.
Though I must be free to create whatever identity I want.
I am in control of my own destiny.
I can make my life so I just need to work harder, be smarter and
I'll have all I want.
So leave me alone and let me do what I want.
Because I got this.

In other words, I can fill my emptiness by being in charge of life and living for me.

I think our folks nailed it, don't you? We are all prone to being plundered by the pirates of deceit. And we know all too well that living by YOLO, FOMO and Promo just doesn't work.

Next, Paul takes them back to basics. He reminds them of the truth. "In Christ, all the fullness of deity dwells bodily. And you have been filled in him." Jesus is the man lit up with the radiance of God. He is the God who came to us as a man, and the man who lived in the fullness of God. Because God was fully joined to him. United to Jesus, we are filled in him. He gives us his Spirit who fills us moment by moment as we rely on him. And as we go through the long process of releasing YOLO, FOMO and Promo into the sufficiency of Christ alone.

Then Paul takes them on a deep dive into why Jesus, and Jesus alone can fill us. He writes about the mystical union we have with Jesus. This is unique among all the religions of the world. It's even strange to most Christians. But it is our

greatest treasure. It's why Jesus actually "works" to change our lives. Here it is. Jesus' story becomes our story. Our story gets taken into Jesus' story.

Jesus has a history. He has a personal story that was lived out in the real world. In a particular place at a particular time. The events of his life were recorded by witnesses and documented by the writers of Scripture. The eternal Son of God stepped into the world in Jesus. He lived among us as a man. He displayed his Father's love and truth through his teachings and his healings. He died as a condemned man on a cross. His body was buried in a tomb and remained there from Friday until Sunday. Then, through the powerful working of God Jesus was raised from the dead. Over forty days he ate and drank with his disciples, preparing them to take his story to the world. Those are key Jesus-events. Now here's the kicker. The spiritual power of those historical events works in us. The meaning of those things Jesus said and deed gets active inside those who are joined to Jesus. When we propel into him through faith, his life's work comes to us in full spiritual effect. That's crazy. And true.

No doubt Paul shocked his audience when he used circumcision to illustrate. "In him, you also were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." Have you thought about it that way recently? Imagine saying to a friend this week, "Yeah, I was saved by the circumcision of Christ." I know: eeks! But the strange and graphic image actually shocks us to see the truth freshly. God cut out my sin by the cutting of Christ. God sheared away the dominating power of sin in my life by the submission of Jesus to the power of death. Jesus' literal circumcision when he was 8 days old proved that he was really human and that he really lived under the Law. It was a sign that he was consecrated to the will of his Father. But that was only a preview of a greater consecration. His death on the cross was another kind of circumcision. His body was cut away from his soul by gruesome death. He shed blood as he kept faith with his Father. And that circumcision took away the sins of the world. He made a blood payment. Now when Jesus joins me to himself, all the meaning of his life, death and resurrection comes into me spiritually. I get the benefit of his circumcision in death. And he cuts me free from being dominated by the old sinful self. He cuts out my heart of stone and gives me a heart able to respond to him. He cuts a new covenant with me, a new deal, sealed in his sacrifice that includes me in his glory.

Paul then connects the sign of the old covenant, circumcision, to the sign of the new covenant in Jesus: baptism. He declares that this symbol shows our mystical union with Christ. What happened to Jesus literally in history happens to us spiritually. Jesus died and was buried. In baptism we go under the waters

symbolizing how we have died to sin with Christ. We rise from the waters joined to his resurrection power. What happened to Jesus in history happens in us spiritually. But truly, with power that frees us and transforms us. And one day it will happen to us in history as well, for these bodies that die will be raised and remade in resurrection glory as we live forever united to Christ as his bride.

This is so rich it overfills me. This is so thick and creamy it overwhelms me. Why would I ever trade the treasure of Christ for the trinkets of YOLO, FOMO, and Promo? C.S. Lewis so poignantly captured this choice when he wrote:

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased (*The Weight of Glory*).

All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus. When we are joined to him, all the power of his history gets loose in our lives. Beloved, let us propel forward into Christ alone!