

We're beginning a series on the Finding God in the Church: the Sacraments. In our Protestant Tradition we have two sacraments: baptism and communion.

The word **Sacrament** derives from a Latin word that classically meant something sacred. In a lawsuit, money deposited by contending parties was *sacramentum*, for when forfeited it was used for a sacred purpose. The word was also used judicially and militarily; *sacramentum dicere* meant to swear an oath. In the early church, *sacramentum* came to apply to many things sacred and to rites which had a hidden meaning. Thus it was used to describe religious ceremonies and was brought into connection with *mysterion* (Gr.), meaning "secret." (see my later note) In the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *sacramentum* is translated for *mysterion* (Eph. 1:9; 3:9; 5:32; Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 1:20; 17:7). Whereas Tertullian (who lived in Carthage, Libya 155 – 240 CE) was the first theologian (to use *sacramentum* with clear religious meaning, two centuries later Augustine (354 – 430 CE) wrote that signs which "pertain to divine things are called sacraments" That broad meaning of the word continued into the Middle Ages. The sign of the cross, palms, ashes, anointing with oil, preaching, prayer, and visitation of the sick were all included....In the thirteenth century the number [of Sacraments] was set at seven (which the Catholic church still maintains)..The Reformers (Calvin, Luther & Zwingli) changed this, reducing it to the two commanded by Jesus in biblical texts."

*the gospel ... bearing fruit and growing in the whole world*,: this repeated expression points back to the image of Jesus as the vine and us as the branches in John 15:5; as well as that of the parable of the Mustard Seed – the smallest of seeds that grows into a place where the birds of the air find shelter, as when Jesus admonishes the disciples in John 15:16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." *Bearing fruit* is the goal and purpose of the gospel and seemingly human life/discipleship. Paul is said to have written this letter (Colossians) to fight heresies in the churches in that region of present day southern Turkey, encouraging the people to return to the life to which they were called in Christ – one potentially "hard" to see in the world.

May 5, 2019

## Colossians 1

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

<sup>2</sup> To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

<sup>3</sup> In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup> that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. <sup>7</sup> This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, <sup>8</sup> and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and

transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,<sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;<sup>16</sup> for **in him** all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.<sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and **in him** all things hold together.<sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.<sup>19</sup> For **in him** all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

<sup>21</sup> And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,<sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his fleshly body[k] through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—<sup>23</sup> provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

<sup>24</sup> I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.<sup>25</sup> I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the **mystery** that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this **mystery**, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>28</sup> It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What shimmers in your attention as you hear this reading?
- How is the purpose of God a **mystery** for the Colossians then? For us now?

**in him:** Greek is curious in that the preposition "in" can also mean "by" (as in through his power, at his bequest Christ all this happen) and can also mean "for" (as in all of this was done for Christ). The depth of the preposition insists upon the depth of the truth that everything is for, by and through Christ: the head of the Church.

This affirmation of Christ **in all things** is central to our Presbyterian understanding of the identity and role of the Church (the body of Christ) expressed in our constitution: (*the Book of Order*) F-1.0201-2

"Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made **Christ Head of the Church, which is his body**. The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

**Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God.** Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills."

**mystery:** μυστήριον or **mysterion** pronounced: [mü-stâ'-rē-on] From a derivative of muo (μυο) (to shut the mouth – as in something that shuts your mouth of out wonder, surprise and a lack of understanding). It can mean 1) a hidden thing, secret, mystery which not obvious to the understanding; 2) a hidden purpose, or counsel. This could be of other human beings or of God. 3) In rabbinic writings, it denotes the mystic or hidden sense of an OT saying, of an image or form seen in a vision, or of a dream. Here Paul is saying that the mystery of God's purpose in and for the world is made visible in the person of Christ Jesus.