

"The Spoils of War"

Text: Colossians 2:6-15

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in the secure knowledge that your sins are one and all forgiven in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and that we are absolutely complete in him, lacking nothing. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Throughout recorded history (actually until relatively recently in civilized countries) soldiers have always been underpaid – especially given the sort of work they are required to perform and the hardship and dangers they face. The well-paid, highly motivated modern American soldier is an historic anomaly. Seldom have military powers been able to rely on all-volunteer armies. Historically those who actually chose such a life did so for one reason: spoils.

In the British armies of yesteryear, for example, soldiers were somewhat placated by their daily ration of rum, but for the most part it was the allure of war booty that kept them from deserting. Soldiers braved complex defenses and appalling casualties when attacking a city because they knew that success would mean that the city and everything in it would belong to them. *If they were successful.* In Bible times the war plunder included the women and children of a captured city.

Imagine then the panic of those women and children as their men struggled to repel an invading army. Not only did they fear for their men; they lived in utter terror for themselves.

This is much more than just an academic exercise for us this morning. A war is raging – here and all around us – and you and I represent the spoils of that war. Lose this war and the misery and slavery that will follow is eternal – absolutely horrible beyond our imagination and absolutely without end.

Bear this simple truth in mind as you hear or read the words of our text for today, found in Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the Second Chapter:

Colossians 2:6-15 *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. ⁸ ¶ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic*

principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. ¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

So far the very words of God. Acknowledging that these are the words of God and not of men, so we pray, "**Sanctify us through Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Dear Fellow Ambassadors for the Lord Jesus, do you agree with the expression: "*Faith can change things*"? Consider that for just a moment. Can faith really change things? Depends, right? *Faith* and *belief* are not the same things. The world doesn't distinguish between the two, but you and I know better. When we use the word *faith* we are almost always using it in terms of *saving* faith, and that, to us, means Christianity or faith in our Triune God. For this reason we cannot separate the idea of *faith* from Christ Jesus our Lord. "*Faith*" is faith that Jesus Christ has earned the forgiveness of our sins.

It is also only in that sense that we can agree that "*faith can change things.*" We saw examples of faith in action in our two Scripture readings for today (Genesis 18:20-32 and Luke 11:1-13). Those readings taught us something about the effectiveness of persistent prayer. Faith leads us to approach God's throne in prayer, and there we find unlimited power and love. In that sense faith can indeed change things – both in us and for us – but only because faith taps into the power of God.

Now compare our understanding of *faith* to the concept of *belief*. Again, the world holds the two to be synonymous. Why? Because the world lump all beliefs and all faiths together as equally valid (or equally ridiculous, as the case may be). Yet while *faith* can and does change things because it taps into the readily available resources of the One true God, a personally held *belief* has no power in and of itself to alter reality. In other words, believing something to be true does not make it

true. Believing that something will happen has no bearing on whether or not it actually will. Believing you will succeed at something does not guarantee success.

Here is the point for you and me as it relates to our text for this morning. If you find yourself headed out into the great unknown, and you could only carry one bit of Scripture along with you as your constant companion and guide, you be hard put to find anything better than our text for this morning. Every single Christian that walks this earth is and will be assaulted by what our text describes as **"hollow and deceptive philosophies,"** yet no one is more at risk than the young men and women who head off to public educational institutions each year. Public universities in particular are spiritual meat grinders. They are the submerged reefs upon which countless young souls have made shipwreck of their faith. They are spiritual death traps.

Make no mistake, these places are called schools, but they are also religious institutions. More than that they are war zones in an epic struggle for human souls. The religion they teach and practice is humanism, mixed with a good bit of narcissism (love of self) and hedonism (love of pleasure). In fact what they teach and promote was described perfectly in our text as **"philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."** We see much the same thing all around us every day, it just seems to be more obvious - *concentrated* - in modern colleges and universities.

That is, in fact, what makes such places (and the world in general) so dangerous. Consider the word translated **"deceit"** in the passage above. The same word can also be translated as *"pleasure"* or *"pleasantness."* That is part of the problem all of us face. The philosophies of men more often than not *seem* good and pleasant. They appeal to our natural sense of "right" because they appeal to the basic principles of this world – to the things all around us and how those things operate. Because they are based on human understanding, they *seem to* make sense to us. The problem is that they are not based on Christ, and it is most certainly true that **"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."**

Our text has a warning for us: **"Beware lest anyone cheat you"** through such **"philosophy and empty deceit"** – and here is where our theme comes into focus. The words translated **"cheat you"** are military words. Literally Paul is telling us to be careful that no one *"takes us as war spoils."* Please understand and acknowledge in your hearts the appropriateness of these words selected by God the Holy Spirit and recorded through the Apostle Paul. There is a battle raging *within* you and *for* you. Your soul is

the war plunder and Satan will not rest until he has carried off every last one of us.

How will he attempt to accomplish this? Any way he can, of course, but he has enjoyed tremendous success using **"philosophy and empty deceit"** - especially on college campuses. Again, why? In part because there the deck is stacked against simple Christians. Thousands of young people gather there to sit at the feet of some of the most intelligent men and women in the world, all of whom teach things that make sense according to the limits of human wisdom. Some of what they teach is true, some is not. How can anyone possibly learn to tell the difference? The problem is further compounded by the fact that our young people naturally come to respect and admire these erudite professionals; yet so much of what they teach is based, in the words of our text, on **"philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."**

Know then that every single soul hearing or reading these words can be mesmerized by such worldly wisdom. All of us are sorely tempted to believe whatever the wise of this world tell us, in part because it will make sense to our sinful reason and our sinful pride, and in part because these men and women are widely regarded as experts in their fields. Don't underestimate either the appeal of rebellious thought or the ease with which damning error can enter the unprotected heart.

Nor will there be an end to either the myriad of different errors you and I will hear or to the clever way that those errors are promoted. You will hear things like, *"I am opposed to traditional Christianity because it oppresses women"* or *"Christianity has some good points, and it is fine for my parents, but I am looking for something more."* You can even expect some to quote (or misquote) the Bible as evidence. The world at large would love to have you believe that there is something bigger and better out there beyond the ancient and (to them) outdated Christian faith. Our text - *God's Word* - assures us on the contrary that **"you are complete in (Christ), who is the head of all principality and power."**

There *is* something out there other than Christianity – a whole world of human thoughts and ideas and beliefs. There are things that will sound new and exciting and seem to make perfect sense. Understand that Christians do not believe what they do because they are ignorant of all of their other choices. They believe what they do because by God's grace and power they reject all that contradicts God's Word as **"vain philosophies"** – mental garbage that can never stand the test

of time. God the Holy Spirit has created and maintained saving faith in your heart, and has protected you from error and has given you true wisdom in Christ. He extends the same offer to all, but that offer is forfeited by those who cast him from their hearts in favor of the "wisdom" of the godless.

There is, of course, much to learn in this world. God's creation is infinitely grand. Yet note well with what marvelous words of comfort and strength our text concludes, for here we are told how and why we lack nothing when we have Christ Jesus: **"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."** Here is a grand and sublime truth that far transcends the combined total of all of man's feeble wisdom. Here is truth that is thoroughly practical, universally applicable, and utterly timeless. Our text goes on - still describing what God has done for us in Jesus Christ: **"(You) He has made alive together with Jesus, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."** Gone are all the sins of mankind. All of them, gone! Nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ who paid in full every bit of punishment that we owed because of our many sins.

Dear Christians this is Life itself. These are life-giving words. They are the height of wisdom and truth in a very foolish and deceitful world. Cling to them. Make them forever your life-philosophy, your "words to live by" for nothing else carries the power to prevent you from being carried away as war spoils by Satan. The fact is there simply *is* nothing better or deeper or more meaningful beyond this simple truth; there is nothing with any sort of eternal value beyond Christ Jesus, crucified for sinners. All human wisdom will be rolled up like a scroll in the fires of the final judgment. Only the Word of God will stand. You, dear Christian, have that Word of Truth as your personal possession. Never trade it, for nothing on earth is of greater value.

Therefore whether you will soon be headed back to school, back to work, or just back home, take Paul's words with you, **"For in (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power... As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."**

We have Christ, truly we lack nothing. Here we are secure. Amen.

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Genesis 18:20-33** And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ "I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." ²² ¶ Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ "Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? ²⁵ "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶ So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." ²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸ "Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of* five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it*." ²⁹ And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do *it* for the sake of forty." ³⁰ Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there." ³¹ And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty." ³² Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten." ³³ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

NKJ **Luke 11:1-13** Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." ² ¶ So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. ³ Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one." ⁵ ¶ And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ 'for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ "and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?' ⁸ "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. ⁹ " So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

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The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 25, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#457- (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 18:20-33) Our two Scripture readings this morning deal not only with prayer, but more specifically with the need for *persistence* in our prayers. Note as you listen to this first account how irritating it is to hear Abraham continue to ask more and more of God. God is not irritated. Learn from this to bring all requests to God – no matter how many or how trivial. God loves to answer the prayers of his children.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Page 35)

The New Testament Lesson: (Luke 11:1-13) In this lesson, Jesus not only teaches his disciples (and us) the Lord's Prayer, he also teaches us something about persistent prayer. It could be argued that the reason we fail to pray as we ought is that we have come to doubt the effectiveness of prayer – especially when prayers are not immediately answered. Be patient and persistent.

The Confession of Faith – The Nicene Creed – Brown Hymnal page 5

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#528- (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be for Me"

The Sermon – Text: Colossians 2:6-15 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Spoils of War"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#306- (Verses 1, 4, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #305- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#528- (Verse 15) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be for Me"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (48) 2010 Average (52) Wednesday (9)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Special Voters' Meeting
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Worship Service
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Quarterly Voters' Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Frank Gantt is considering the call to Red Wing. Spring, TX has called Pastor Roland Gurgel of Weslaco, TX.

VBS – A well-deserved thank you to those members who contributed their time and treasure to the VBS effort this year. The Word of God was shared with all eligible children of the congregation, along with non-member guests. Thank you!

Voters' Meetings – A brief special Voters' Meeting is scheduled for this morning following the fellowship hour, and a regular Voters' meeting is scheduled for next Sunday. The purpose of the meeting this morning is to introduce potential changes to our constitution, which will then be acted upon at the regular meeting next Sunday.

Men's Retreat – The Men's Retreat has been postponed for the time being. We will take a look at rescheduling in the fall.

Voting Membership Applications – Scott Schiermeister, Joshua Baker, and Andrew Roehl have applied for voting membership at St. Paul. Comments concerning these applications should be directed to the Pastor or to Pres. Mike McEnroe prior to today's meeting.

Church Council Notes – Minutes from the July 20 Council Meeting are available from Secretary Loren Ollenburger.