

# "Direction"

Text: Colossians 1:13-20

As Paul greeted the Church in Colossae in the verses that immediately precede this morning's text: **"(May God the Father) fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.."**

Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of God's unlimited kindness:

I'm not sure exactly when it began, but in my mind one of the more telling polls is *"Direction of the Country,"* also known as *"Right Track or Wrong Track."* It's an *opinion* poll, of course, so it's based not so much on reality or science as it is on the individual's impression of reality and what the future will bring. It's a poll of where folks *think* things are going. In other words, if things keep going the way they are, as time goes on will our country be better or worse.

Direction is actually a really big deal to Christians, or at least it should be. Christians recognize that almost nothing gets either better or worse all at once. Both improvement and decline are almost always gradual. So it is that we don't (or shouldn't) expect marriages to get better all at once; we look at direction. Are things getting better or worse? If things go on as they are, a year from now will our marriage be stronger or weaker, better or worse? If the answer is worse, obviously something has to be done to reverse the current trend.

We need to ask the same questions of our individual spiritual state – our faith life and the relationship with our God. We need to do an honest self-evaluation to determine if we are growing or declining spiritually. The reality we need to face is that if things are declining, and we do nothing about it, catastrophe of the worst sort looms.

This idea or concept of direction is actually one of the key components of our text for this morning (in a number of different ways) and it is on that facet of our text that we will focus this morning. That text is found recorded in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the First Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 1:13-20** *(The Father) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to 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 by him all things*

*were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

These are the verbally inspired words of the Creator of heaven and earth. What thanksgiving ought to fill our hearts each time we hear or read what the one true God has preserved and delivered to each one of us, for by these precious truths we are both healed and saved. That our God would so bless each of us today through the study of these words, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

This morning our task is relatively simple. All that we have to do is to draw direction arrows in our minds. The first relates to our introduction and has to do with our own personal spiritual trend. The second has to do with our basic sense of whom or what our lives here on this earth are all about. The third puts it all into perspective when we draw the direction arrow of what our Savior has done for us.

The general topic of direction sounds simple, and it is. The problem is that *simple* isn't the same as *easy*. It is relatively simple to determine if we are growing spiritually or if we are declining. The remedy is also fairly simple, but actually putting the remedy into practice isn't always easy. Although it should be.

The questions we need to ask ourselves are, again, simple. "Is my faith growing stronger or weaker?" "Am I growing closer to my God or drifting away from him?" "Am I growing in my knowledge and understanding of God's Word, or am I forgetting even what I once knew?"

If the answer to any of these questions is that my personal direction arrow indicates a decline, I need to first recognize the seriousness of the situation, and then take the necessary steps to correct the problem. Those steps, again, are simple, but for some reason we find them anything but easy. The solution always involves more exposure to the Word of God – which is the divine power by which we are saved. Decline is always a result of starving ourselves of that divine power that God himself has provided for us.

Again, that all sounds so simple, but the hectic pace of our society makes it so difficult to follow through on even our best intentions. The problem is that the resolve and dedication that we seek are also gifts given to us

through exposure to the Word of God. In other words, the more we read and study God's Word, the greater our desire and determination to study that Word.

Many find it helpful to extend their personal direction arrow into the future and to examine the projected outcome soberly and honestly. In other words, the future of decline is eternal failure, while the future of growth is eternal life in heaven.

The other exercise that many find helpful has to do with the other kind of "direction" outlined in our text for this morning. Listen again to some of the key statements that are found there that help to enlighten and direct us: ***"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. <sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."***

The Christian religion can be reduced to very simple terms. John 3:16 comes to mind. But there's another technique or exercise that involves mentally drawing a great big direction arrow. If, for example, someone asks about justification, the arrow points from God to man, since it is God who has declared man to be not guilty on the basis of what his Son did for us. Grace? God to Man. Baptism and communion? God to man. In all of these, God works in or on man. Yet when it comes to things like thanksgiving and praise, then the arrow is man to God.

All of those ought to be fairly obvious to Christians. There are some, however, that are not so clear. What about love, for example. Our natural inclination is to have the arrow point to ourselves. We want to be loved. Yet God's Word consistently speaks of love as an arrow pointing outward – to our God and to our neighbor – because that arrow first pointed toward us. God's idea of love is not when we seek to be served but when, like Christ himself, we seek to serve others.

Yet whenever someone in our secular society offers to help another human being to "gain direction" in his or her life, what are they almost always talking about? What are they offering? To whom or to what does that arrow almost always point?

The answer is that it points almost always to "self." That's the direction of the world in which we live, and we hear it advocated in our music, by our advertisers, self-help gurus, screen writers, authors, and poets. All point the big arrow of importance inward, to self, and justify such selfishness with hollow mantras like *"you can't take care of others unless you take care of yourself*

*first."* Obviously, at least on some levels, there is a germ of truth in that much abused statement, but a careful examination reveals much more lie than truth.

Would anyone really challenge the assertion that we are a self-centered, narcissistic people and that any encouragement for more of the same amounts to charging madly in the wrong direction? Our national mantra is: *"It's all about me."*

The problem here goes well beyond bad form or manners. The problem with any "me-first" society is that it stands in sharp contrast to God's Word and will. God's will is clear here, and there can be no doubt after rereading the inspired words of our text that *my life, as a Christian, is all about my Savior God.*" The big arrow points away from me and to my God. In fact if you happened to be counting, our text contains a total of 14 pronouns (He, Him, Himself) directing our attention to God and away from self.

Before we discuss the ramifications of this information, it should be noted that this is far from an isolated passage. This particular truth is established and reestablished throughout the pages of Holy Writ. 1 Corinthians 10:31, ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*** Again in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*** Over and over, without a single contradictory word or passage, the Bible draws the arrow from man to man's God. You and I are not the center of our universe. God is.

What exactly does this information do for us? How should it affect how we think, act, speak, and plan? The ramifications are absolutely all-encompassing. No facet or aspect of our lives is left out. Every single thing that we think, say, do, or plan is all supposed to be directed toward the glory, praise, and service of our God. Stop and think about that for a bit.

I'm not sure that self-centered human beings can actually take in and comprehend such far-reaching truth in one sitting. As the old car commercial used to say: *This changes everything.* Some examples will undoubtedly prove helpful. This means, for example, that career choices have little to do with me, and everything to do with my God. It puts the eraser to all of the old questions and indelibly writes in new ones. No longer is it *"What makes me happy?"* or *"What will result in financial success or prestige for me?"* Recognizing that the arrow is supposed to point to my God, the question now becomes, *"How can I best serve and glorify my God with the gifts and talents that he has given me?"* In short, our whole thought process is suddenly and dramatically altered.

One of the things that becomes immediately apparent is that God's view of things stands in stark contradiction to man's self-centered ideas. Our young people today tend to struggle with career choices for the most part because they have been counseled not to seek the glory of God and his service in whatever they do, but to investigate the deep recesses of their own yearnings and desires and to pursue whatever makes them truly happy. If that is the criteria, what are our young people going to come up with? If playing video games gives you joy, then try to find a job where you can play video games for a living. If you like to hunt or fish, maybe you can find some sponsors and do that for a living. You like those cool apps on your cell phone? Maybe create new ones as a career. Are you seeing the problem here? Point the arrow back to yourself and God is generally left out of the picture.

The great challenge, of course, is not so much identifying what you might be good at; it is figuring out how to use what God gave you to glorify him in all that you do. The fact is when you focus on your God and his glory and service, he always makes the other things in life fall into place. Always.

But this brings us to the final direction arrow that we need to draw this morning. That last direction arrow is drawn by filling in the blank in this statement: *When it comes to Jesus Christ and his work of salvation, it is all about \_\_\_\_\_.*

The answer, of course, is "me." *When it comes to Jesus Christ and his work of salvation, it is all about me.*

Again, you see the problem immediately, don't you? Here the arrow points from Christ to me. Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter are really not all about Christ, are they? They are all about you and me. Jesus didn't come to earth to save himself; he came to save me. He didn't suffer and die to pay for his own sins; he suffered and died to pay for *my* sins. Jesus didn't leave heaven because he lacked something; he left because *we* lacked something. The arrow points right to you, and it is underscored each time you commune and hear those comforting, personal words: "***Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.***"

In this we recognize again the mystery of the gospel itself. The very one who, according to our text, ***created all things that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers,*** the very one who ***"is before all things, and in Him all things consist"*** – that is the one who decided to draw the arrow to you and me and to say, *"My life is all about you and your salvation."* The amazing result, again in the words of our text, is that ***"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."***

Because God determined that his Son – ***"in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"*** – would be all about us, now our entire time of grace here on earth is to be all about him. Far from burdensome or oppressive, this is our great joy and privilege. Turn away then from the world's selfish, self-serving ambitions and desires and be true men and women of God – which is nothing more than our reasonable service. Jesus was all about our business; what a joyful privilege now to be all about his. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

ESV **Malachi 3:13-18** "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' <sup>14</sup> You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?' <sup>15</sup> And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape." <sup>16</sup> ¶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. <sup>17</sup> "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. <sup>18</sup> Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

ESV **Luke 23:35-47** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." <sup>39</sup> ¶ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." <sup>44</sup> ¶ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup> Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**Last Sunday of the Church Year – November 20, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 536 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Malachi 3:13-18) We have again enjoyed God's grace – his undeserved love – through another church year. As we look back at the blessings of the past, it is also good and right that we look forward to the end of this present existence. Christians are often confused at how the wicked seem to prosper outwardly while believers routinely do not. In this lesson we are again reminded that God is not fooled. What a man sows he will also one day be made to reap. In other words, all will be called to account for their actions. Only those who trust Christ's payment for their sins will escape God's wrath on Judgment Day.

## Psalm of the Day – Psalm 118 (Supplement page 29) (Brown Hymnal)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Luke 23:35-47) This is the account of the penitent thief on the cross. It may seem odd to hear this reading just before Advent, instead of in Lent. Yet this reading is perhaps the clearest and most comforting source of proof that it is never too late for a sinner to be saved. We note here especially how clearly the idea of work righteousness is excluded, since the malefactor certainly had no way of earning forgiveness for an entire lifetime of sin. Surely we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and it is never too late to share that truth with the world.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 798 (Brown Hymnal)

"God We Praise You"

## The Sermon – Text: Colossians 1:13-20 (Printed on the back page)

**"Direction"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn - 762 (Brown Hymnal)

"This Is He"

## The Offering

## The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Closing Hymn - 536 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance - Sunday (47) Ave (48)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Choir Practice
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-5:30 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Thanksgiving Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

**CLC News** – Having accepted the call to become the full time CLC Visiting Missionary, Pastor Todd Ohlmann is scheduled to be commissioned at a special service in Eau Claire on January 2. Pastor Ohlmann plans to remain in the St. Louis area and will spend about 6 months of the year overseas. He will continue on the Board of Missions in an advisory capacity. Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids has called Pastor Timothy Wheaton. Zion of Atlanta has called Pastor Michael Wilke.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning. On the agenda is the scheduling of our special Advent services, as well as the start time of our Christmas Eve service. The Council is considering a 5p start time for the Christmas Eve service, and either November 30, December 7 and 14 for our Advent services, or December 7, 14 and 21. Please speak to a Council member prior to the meeting to include your thoughts on any of these decisions.

**Thanksgiving Service** – Please note that our annual Thanksgiving service is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7p. Confirmation students and parents please note that Confirmation classes will be moved up to 5:30p beginning this week and continuing through Advent.