

# "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 pretty sure I know how most of you feel about the direction of our country today. You are not alone. Nearly three out of every four Americans are pessimistic about the direction of our country. To put it another way, nearly 75% of our fellow citizens (85% according to one poll) believe that they will be much worse off if the current trends continue. Obviously this is a sentiment based not so much on reality as it is on things like emotion, opinion, and fear. As Christians, we need to operate on the basis of reality.

Direction is actually a really big deal to Christians, or at least it should be. Wise 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 things like marriages, financial problems, and the like to get better all at once. We focus on direction. Are things getting better or worse? If things go on as they are, a year from now will our marriage or our finances 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 our relationship with our God. We need to do a real and 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 aspect 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.*

This is God's Word. 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.

As the church year draws to a close this morning our task is relatively simple. We're going to draw direction lines or arrows. The first relates to our introduction and has to do with our own personal spiritual trend. The next has to do with the basic direction of the Christian faith itself. The third depends on what we learn from the second.

We draw our first direction arrow by asking a few simple questions: *"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 indicates a decline, we need to first recognize the seriousness of the situation, and then take the necessary steps to correct the problem. Those steps are actually rather 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.

The hectic pace of our society is a big part of what makes it so difficult to follow through on even our best intentions. The problem is compounded by the fact 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 continue in that Word. The less we are exposed, the more our desire wanes.

If you are having trouble grasping the seriousness of this exercise, extend your personal direction arrow into the indefinite future and examine the projected outcome soberly and honestly. The terminus of continued decline is eventually eternal failure, while the future of growth is eternal life in heaven. This is how we remind ourselves that nothing on earth should be more important or a higher priority in our lives.

Our second arrow this morning has to do with the direction of the Christian faith itself. The Christian religion can be reduced to very simple terms – like Jesus himself did in John 3:16. Yet here even many professing Christians get the direction all wrong, imagining that the direction arrow of the key doctrines of the Christian faith point to God – God demanding that we do things for him. But that's not the Christian faith. Consider the doctrine of justification. That arrow clearly 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, on, or for us.

There's a helpful exercise that will help. Fill 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.* Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter were really not all about Christ, were they? They were all about you and me. Jesus didn't come to earth to save himself; he didn't need saving. He came to save you and me. He didn't suffer and die to pay for his own sins; he had none. He suffered and died to pay for *our* 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..."***

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 (whom) all things consist"*** – that is the Savior-God 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."***

This is the great mystery of the gospel – that God himself, who owed us nothing, would give himself to provide what mankind needed. To provide what you and I needed. Jesus made his earthly life all about miserable, unworthy sinners.

Understanding as we do the direction arrow of God's own salvation plan, we have one final direction arrow to draw. Given what we now know, what should our lives look like going forward? Before you answer, take a moment to understand the various forms of misdirection that you are up against.

The first misdirection is to imagine that we now owe God a debt that we have to work at repaying. We certainly do owe everything to our God, but the Christian faith itself is based on the immutable truth that there is absolutely no part of that debt that any of us could ever repay. In fact God's Word teaches us that even trying to repay our God is in itself a rejection of Jesus – who already (and alone) paid all, in full. Our last direction arrow (*"What should be the focus and direction of my life going forward?")* has absolutely nothing to do with repayment. It really isn't even all about being grateful. It is about walking in harmony with the new man that God has brought to life within us. That new man within us understands full well that the gifts of forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life that we have been given can never be repaid. The fact that they've been earned by Jesus alone and freely given to us is the very basis of our faith. But that new man also now wants to do the right thing – always and only. What is that right thing? What does that look like? Our text for this morning provides perfect guidance, perfect direction, for there we are reminded that our lives now are all about Jesus Christ.

Listen again to how our text points every direction arrow to our Savior Jesus: ***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.**" 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.*" 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.

Nor is this a unique or isolated Bible truth. It is established and reestablished throughout the pages of God's Word. 1 Corinthians 10:31, **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."** 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."** Romans 11:36, **"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."** Over and over, without a single contradictory word or passage, the Bible makes it clear that you and I are not to be 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. 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 *can and should be* all about him. Far from burdensome or oppressive, this is our great joy and privilege. Put on that new man and refuse to conform to the world's selfish, self-serving ambitions and desires. Instead, be true men and women of God, which is nothing more than our reasonable service – simply the right thing. Jesus was all about our business. What a joyful privilege now to be all about his. Amen.

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!"

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# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Last Sunday of the Church Year – November 20, 2022**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 536 (Stanzas 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. 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 Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

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

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

## 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 Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (33)

### 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>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-5:45 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>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Joe Naumann is considering the calls to Ascension of Tacoma and Redemption of Lynnwood. Pastor Bruce Naumann is considering the call as 3<sup>rd</sup> Foreign Missionary. Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning.

**2023 Usher/Cleaner List** – The 2023 list is being prepared. Please contact Phil Pfennig with any changes/requests.

**Membership Application** – After a course of instruction, Dalton Loeb has applied for communicant membership at St Paul.

**Church Christmas Party** – Our Annual Christmas Party is scheduled for Dec. 3 at 6pm. See the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

**Thanksgiving Service** – As is our custom, we will give thanks to our God for all his countless blessings in a service this Wednesday at 7pm. Given the extent of His blessings, this is altogether fitting – especially for God's own children.