

# "Work Heartily, as for the Lord"

Text: Colossians 3:23-24

May the undeserved love of God, his grace, fill you with hope and confidence in your Lord, your Savior and Friend, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

As the war in Ukraine drags on, Russia has discovered that an old ally cannot be trusted. Can you guess the identity of that ally, the incredibly powerful ally that once came to Russia's aid but has now turned against her?

This is, after all, not the first time Ukraine and Russia have been at war. The last time, however, they were on the same side as part of the mighty Soviet Empire. Their common enemy was the seemingly unstoppable army of Nazi Germany. Though the various countries that comprised the Soviet Union hurled millions of men and thousands of tanks, cannon, and aircraft at the enemy, it was their special ally that was able to finally grind the Nazi invasion to a halt. Mud. Seas of rich, greasy, black mud. Wheeled vehicles were helpless. They had to be inched along by tracked vehicles, which themselves could barely navigate the quagmire. This, in turn, overtaxed even the tracked machines and simply wore them out. Such is the power of mud.

During the course of the current war, Russia has found mud to be not only a fickle ally but an extraordinarily formidable enemy. There is, for Christians, a lesson to be learned here.

The text that will instruct us as to how and why this morning is found recorded in Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the Third Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup>(Colossians 3:23-24) **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

This is God's Word – divine truth miraculously preserved down through the ages for our study, growth, and comfort. That our God would grant us such great gifts also this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

So, just what in the world could mud possibly have to do with us here this morning? A great deal, as it turns out, as it is one of the single greatest killers of both individual Christians, and Christian congregations, around the world. We just know it by different names, like apathy, indifference, and lethargy, and we underestimate its destructive power to our eternal peril.

I'd be curious to know if all of this has struck any of you as hyperbole, as a gross exaggeration of a threat or danger that poses only a negligible risk to solid Christian folk. If so, I pray you will not leave here this morning with such a view intact.

Arguably the best-known Biblical condemnation of apathy is found in the Holy Spirit's warning to the Church in Laodicea in Revelation 3: **"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. <sup>15</sup> 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.'**"

What makes this warning all the more daunting and alarming are the other references to the Church of Laodicea in the Bible, including Paul's reference at the beginning of this same Epistle to the Colossians, from which our text is taken. The congregations in Colossae and Laodicea appeared to have been sister congregations, separated by only about 12 miles. This letter to the Colossians was to be shared with Laodicea, and the letter to Laodicea (of which we know nothing today) was to be shared with Colossae. So to the two congregations Paul wrote: **"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."**<sup>ESV</sup>(Colossians 2:1-5)

There is no Biblical evidence that Paul ever visited either of these congregations. He certainly hadn't when he wrote this letter, since he referred to those ***"who have not seen me face to face,"*** yet he had heard enough about them to write: ***"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."*** How is it then possible that only about 30 years later we read in John's Revelation that God was ready to ***"spit them out of his mouth,"*** and described them as ***"wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"***?

Their great enemy, that which obviously devastated the once thriving congregation, was apathy, indifference, lethargy – mud. Are you starting to see the danger?

Apathy is a killer. It arrives gently, like rain on the soil. We see it first as a good thing, a necessary thing, for as all life needs water, so all living things need rest, need to let go for a time to regroup and refresh. Yet, as with all good things, there is a limit beyond which good becomes very, very bad. We saw heart-breaking evidence a few weeks ago in Texas of what too much rain can look like. So also apathy tends to arrive as a quiet, welcome guest – that never wants to leave. We get bogged down in the mud of the everyday grind, and the ever-present Siren song in our ears has lyrics like *"What's the use?"* and *"Who really cares?"* and *"What difference does it make?"* and perhaps the most seductive *"Someone else will do it."*

Recognize also that indifference doesn't need much of an invitation. It's equally happy to move right in when things are going badly and we get discouraged, or when everything is going great. The latter seems to have been the case in Laodicea. Apparently they were swimming in success, since they were saying, ***"I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing."*** In the best of times, Christians need to learn to say, *"It's never enough!"* Not when even one soul is in danger of dying in unbelief. How much more then when our labors seem in vain, when no one seems to be interested in the gospel message of forgiveness and life eternal, when our little congregations see no growth, when week after week you see only the same regular faces, try as we might to persuade others to come, hear, learn, and grow.

The Holy Spirit is obviously intimately familiar with human indifference. It's clearly then no mere coincidence that in the very next chapter after he led Paul to praise the members in Colossae and Laodicea, he inspired Paul to convey the message of our text. Hear it again: ***Whatever***

***you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,*** <sup>24</sup>  
***knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*** Why, so soon after praising their ***"good order"*** and ***"firmness of faith"*** would the Holy Spirit deem it necessary to encourage these Christians to ***"work heartily"*** and to remember for whom they worked? The answer, obviously, is the "mud" of success and the indifferent born of apparent failure.

Our text begins, ***"Whatever you do, work heartily..."*** *"Work heartily"* doesn't really capture the force or sense of what the Holy Spirit here inspired. More literally he said, ***"If you do anything, work from the soul."***

The sort of relationship we want with our Savior is one that grows ever deeper, ever stronger, ever closer. When that relationship grows, and when we recognize that everything that we do is for him, then the work, whatever it is, comes not from compulsion or from anything superficial. It comes from deep within us, from our core, our very soul. Then it is not what we do but a reflection of who we truly are. That's what the Holy Spirit is telling us in the opening line of our text: *"Work from the soul, no matter what you do."*

This is the first antidote to apathy and indifference. When your core is right, and when you simply do what is in that core, apathy has no place in your life to pitch its tent.

The second antidote is to simply remind yourself who it is for whom you are working. Our text put it plainly: ***"...as for the Lord and not for men... You are serving the Lord Christ."*** That's a pretty awesome truth, isn't it. Remember, these words weren't written to pastors. They were written to the members of those two congregations. We also know that since God's Word was written down and preserved for our benefit, these words were also directed toward every single Christian that would ever hear or read them – including each of us here this morning. *You* are working for the Lord Jesus. Hard to be indifferent when your boss is Jesus.

So what is the particular danger that we here today face; that is, what is the specific application to the members of this congregation? The most obvious is to imagine that the work is someone else's, not yours. God in his Word does not paint a picture of his Church as of one, or even just a couple, pulling the wagon and the others riding. God himself described it in our second reading this morning as a

functioning body, *every single member* of that body using their gifts fully, from the soul, for their Savior. Every congregation is therefore a shared ministry. It needs to be that way, because you have gifts others do not, and you will meet souls in your circle of life that others never will.

Yet all of this would remain rather cold and detached if not for the goal, which is also mentioned in our text: “***The inheritance.***” The eternal, perfect, pain-free, blissful inheritance of heaven forever with the very One for whom we are working on this earth – the Lord Jesus.

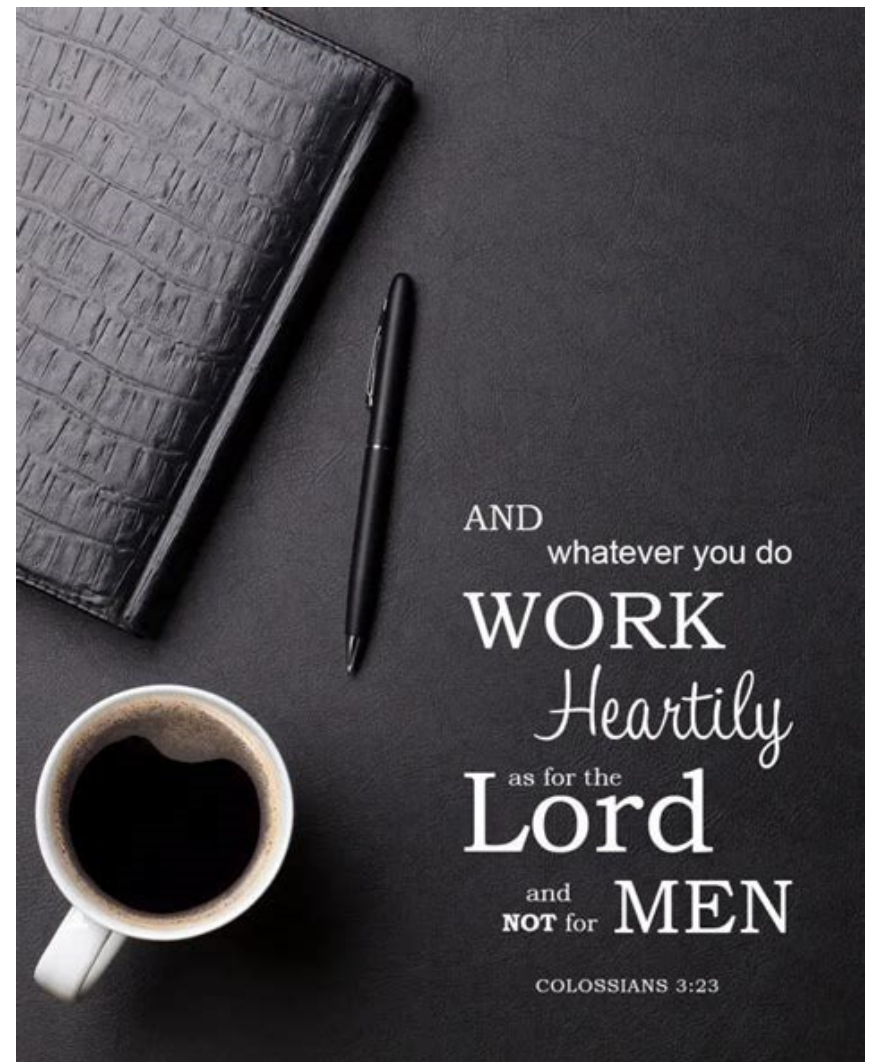
“***Inheritance***” is, of course, the right word here. An inheritance is earned by another and given freely to one who has not earned. That’s the forgiveness that is ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ. He earned every last part of that inheritance by his perfect life, offered in innocent death on the cross. He earned it by the bloody sweat of his brow in Gethsemane. He earned it by refusing to defend himself against the false testimony of his enemies at his trial, by suffering the abandonment of even his closest friends, by the beating and ridicule of his enemies. With every thought, every word, every action, he earned forgiveness for every single one of our countless offenses – including our apathy and indifference. What an insult to him to ever imagine that we need to add to what he has already earned, or that we even could add to our own sin payment. Jesus earned that sin payment in our stead, and our substitute, and to us he says only, “*Believing, it is yours – free and complete – pardon for every sin and the pure joy of eternity with me in heaven.*”

The kingdom work that we here share is all about the simple proclamation of what Jesus has already done for every sinner. God the Father bless each of us with a heart full of joy and confidence, and an abiding energy and conviction for the ongoing work that is before us. Let’s be about our Father’s business. Every single one of us. Amen.

ESV(**Isaiah 6:1-8**) In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." <sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

ESV(**Ephesians 4:1-16**) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." <sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

ESV(**Colossians 3:23-24**) Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.



## ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – July 20, 2025**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 147 (Blue Hymnal)

"God, We Praise You"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

**The First Lesson:** (Isaiah 6:1-8) It is difficult to imagine any Christian, pastor or layman, who feels adequate for the high calling of serving as God's ambassador. Honesty compels us to acknowledge that we are clay vessels and unworthy in every way. The Prophet Isaiah surely agreed, as we hear in our first lesson. We, like him, are only adequate because of the Word that God Himself has given us to share.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Blue Hymnal Page 90)

**The Second Lesson:** (Ephesians 4:1-16) Our second reading is part of the Apostle Paul's counsel to the Christians in Ephesus. Here we have a tremendous summary of the work that He Himself has given to each one of us. It is God who gave some to be pastors and teachers, but God gave them to equip others to also carry out his kingdom work. God describes His Church as a body, where every individual member simply does what God Himself has equipped them to do.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Blue Hymnal page 5)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 403 (Blue Hymnal)

"This Is He"

## The Sermon – Text: Colossians 3:23-24 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Work Heartily, as for the Lord"**

## The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 663 (Blue Hymnal)

"Church of God, Elect and Glorious"

## The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 142 (Blue Hymnal)

"On My Heart Imprint Your Image"

## 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 and around the world. 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 (29) Average (38)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Thomas Naumann has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor David Ude is considering the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA. Pastor Em. John Schierenbeck has been called by Peace Thru Christ of Middleton, WI to serve as vacancy pastor. Pastor Em. Paul Nolting has accepted a part-time teaching call to Immanuel of Mankato, MN.

## Church Council Notes – The Church Council met on Tuesday, July 15<sup>th</sup>.

Offerings for June were slightly above budgeted needs and are now negative \$850 YTD, net of expenses. A list of church maintenance projects is available on the mailbox table. The Council is conducting a review of current church policies to validate current relevance. A volunteer is needed to prepare a paper for the May of 2026 WDCD in Cheyenne entitled: "Benefits of Attending 'in person' Church rather than 'online' Church." Next Council meeting is scheduled for 8/12 at 6pm.

**Women's Retreat West** – Registration is now open for this year's Women's Retreat West, to be held in Sioux Falls from September 19-21. The theme this year is "Pieces of Jesus' Peace". To register, go to [womensretreat.clclutheran.net](http://womensretreat.clclutheran.net), click on WEST, and fill out the form. Questions can be addressed to [womensretreatwest@gmail.com](mailto:womensretreatwest@gmail.com).

**VBS and Picnic** – Vacation Bible School is scheduled for August 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> and the Church Picnic for August 10<sup>th</sup>.