

Colossians 1:21-29

²¹At one time, you were alienated from God and hostile in your thinking as expressed through your evil deeds. ²²But now Christ reconciled you in his body of flesh through death, in order to present you holy, blameless, and faultless before him— ²³if you continue steadfast and firm in faith, without being moved away from the hope of the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a minister.

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church. ²⁵I became a minister of the church for your benefit when God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God, ²⁶namely, the mystery that was hidden for past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. ²⁷God wanted to make known to them what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles—this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸We proclaim him as we admonish and teach everyone with all wisdom, so that we might present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹This is the goal I am laboring to reach, striving with his strength, which is powerfully at work in me.

Proclaim the Word

I.

There is a great evil abroad in the world right now.

This present time has been called by some the golden age of television, because there is so much new content and so much creativity, they say. Netflix and Hulu and Amazon Prime all have to compete for your streaming dollars, so they are creating original content at a breakneck pace. But is it *really* the golden age of television? Streaming services no longer have to concern themselves with the censorship necessary for broadcast television, and they are *not* self-censoring. Violence and foul language and graphic sexual content permeate this new “golden age” of television.

Television and other entertainment, of course, aren't the end of the great evil abroad in the world today, they just mimic it and document it. Perhaps, some would say, they even promote it and push it into the mainstream of society. Moral values—or lack thereof—have changed drastically in the last 10 years in American culture. Where some immoral behavior used to be frowned upon or relegated to secret society, now it is open and promoted and celebrated.

The great evil abroad in the world affects everyone. Family life is strained by the choices of one member of the family unit. Divorce impacts families from every sliver of society. The seeming-anonymity of the internet lures people into pornography and all kinds of anti-social behaviors and attitudes.

“At one time, you were alienated from God and hostile in your thinking as expressed through your evil deeds” (Colossians 1:21, EHV). Alienated from God. Hostile in thinking. Expressing oneself with evil deeds. Did you ever stop to think about how *many* people out of the 7 billion living today have never given much thought to God? How many atheists are there? How many who fashion their own gods or call on false gods? How many who think that *this* world is all there is, and therefore express their feelings with evil deeds, thinking there is no punishment other than the end of their lives?

There is a great evil abroad in the world right now. That's probably the safest statement ever made, since there is *always* a great evil in the world. Evil has dominated every culture that has existed since Adam and Eve reached for the forbidden fruit.

II.

There is a great evil abroad in the world right now. Are you immune to the great evil? Do you even recognize it?

Sometimes followers of the Lord Jesus get a little too comfortable. The way of the world becomes not just the way of the world, but *our* way. We willingly imitate the world.

“At one time, you were alienated from God and hostile in your thinking as expressed through your evil deeds. ²²But now Christ reconciled you in his body of flesh through death, in order to present you holy, blameless, and faultless before him” (Colossians 1:21-22, EHV).

God spent a lot of time and effort on you. When the people he has called and chosen resist him, God is grieved.

Paul says: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church. ²⁵I became a minister of the church for your benefit when God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God” (Colossians 1:24-25, EHV). Do *you* rejoice in the suffering you might have been called on to endure for the sake of the gospel? Maybe you have made a decision to *not* suffer for the sake of the gospel. Yours is a decision to *not* serve or protect or support Christians and those who are proclaiming the gospel message. Certainly *you* don't want to stick your neck out and be identified as one who is willing to speak about Jesus, because that might draw the ridicule of your friends and coworkers—or even your family.

“Christ reconciled you in his body of flesh through death, in order to present you holy, blameless, and faultless before him— ²³if you continue steadfast and firm in faith, without being moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:22-23, EHV). When you dishonor God with your choices to follow along with the masses of society, and when you refuse to suffer for the sake of the gospel, you begin to move away from the hope of the gospel. You refuse to remain firmly grounded and steadfast in your faith. Not turning back from such a destructive path eventually leads to forfeiting the benefits of his death for you.

The Apostle Paul understands these destructive paths. After all, he was once on them, himself. He *thought* he was doing the Lord's work—persecuting Christians because they were destroying what he saw of as the godly way of life in Judaism.

III.

But God chose him. God changed him. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf... ²⁵ I became a minister of the church for your benefit when God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God” (Colossians 1:24-25, EHV). Instead of *causing* suffering within the Christian Church, Paul began suffering *for* the church. He could even say he *rejoiced* in suffering for the Christian Church, because it was Christ living in him and through him.

“I became a minister of the church for your benefit when God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God, ²⁶namely, the mystery that was hidden for past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. ²⁷God wanted to make known to them what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery” (Colossians 1:25-27, EHV). Today we have the privilege of installing two teachers. Keri Embank is taking on new responsibilities, becoming the director of our preschool. The other is our new emergency teacher, Raquel

Freese, whom most of us will have the chance to meet for the first time today. Just like the Apostle Paul, they have been called to the task of fully proclaiming the word of God to the students of our Christian Day School and Preschool.

“God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God, ²⁶namely, the mystery that was hidden for past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. ²⁷God wanted to make known to them what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery” (Colossians 1:25-27, EHV). God has planned this all along, even from eternity, knowing that mankind would need saving. But God’s plan wasn’t fully revealed all at once. Adam and Eve thought the birth of their first son was the one who would crush the serpent’s head and restore their relationship with God, but millennia remained to wait until God’s timing was right. Throughout those years God sent prophets again and again to expound upon and expand the details of his plan for his people to hear, but the full knowledge of that plan was still a mystery.

The mystery has been revealed to his saints. Saints are believers; that makes *you* a saint. You believe in what the Lord Jesus has done—you know that he died on the cross to take away the sins of the world.

IV.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, EHV). The mystery has been revealed to the saints—to you who believe in what Jesus has done. But there are many to whom this message is still foolishness.

“God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God, ²⁶namely, the mystery that was hidden for past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. ²⁷God wanted to make known to them what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery” (Colossians 1:25-27, EHV). It’s not only a task for Called Workers. Every saint listening to me today has the task of fully proclaiming the mystery that has been revealed to us. Not only is it a task, it is a privilege.

I know at least one of the young people who are being commissioned by the WELS for service in Asia this year. A member of Holy Trinity, Sara Zondag, still works with our WELS mission efforts in Thailand.

Pray for those who go in your name across the world to proclaim the mystery of Christ. Contribute to proclaiming this mystery with your offerings. The dollars you put in the offering plate and donate online to Holy Trinity support the ministry we do *here* at Holy Trinity church and school, and also dollars we, as a congregation, send to the Wisconsin Synod to support work like this around the world.

There are 7.7 billion people in the world and less than 33% of them are Christian. They need to hear the foolish message of the cross. They *need* the mystery revealed. Your prayers and your offerings help support the mystery revealed.

See it as your privilege to support the work of the teachers we install and missionaries around the world. See it also as your privilege to participate in proclaiming the word of God in your family and among your friends. May God bless your calling in whatever vocation you find yourself in to continue to share the good news of the mystery of salvation in Christ Jesus. Amen.