

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
May 2, 2010

A Faithful Community

Colossians 1:1-14

Key verse: “We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9).

They worked together every day at the furniture delivery company and didn’t know. Gary would lift one end of the couch and Randy the other. People said they looked alike, but they chalked that up to coincidence.

Randy had been researching his family history. He was an adopted son, and a new law in Maine allowed him to finally see his birth certificate. He learned that both his parents had died but that they had another son, born June 10, 1974. Then, on a furniture delivery run, it happened again. A customer commented on how much Randy looked like Gary. Randy started nonchalantly asking Gary some more personal questions, like when his birthday is. “As soon as he said his birthday, I knew,” Randy said later. Gary is his brother.

Here they had grown up in neighboring towns and attended rival schools—only a year apart in age—and never known about each other. It was a shock to both of them. “Phenomenal,” said Gary. “I still can’t wrap my head around it.” A co-worker, Greg Berry, said, “There’s nothing like family, especially when you don’t have one. Now they’ve got it.”

But that’s not all. After their story appeared in the local paper, “a teary-eyed woman showed up at the brothers’ workplace clutching a birth certificate.” She was their half-sister, born five or six years before the two men to the same mother. “After all these years,” she said in an interview with a reporter, “here I am 41, and now I finally found my brothers.”

That is a great picture of the church! Men and women meet at church and find that they are really brothers and sisters—that there is a striking family resemblance, a deep, inexplicable bond. And finally we can start being the family we never knew we had. (Source: *The Bangor Daily News* and *The Nashua Telegraph*, 9-22-09)

The apostle Paul wrote the Book of Colossians to one specific church, located in what is now modern-day Turkey. The first 14 verses of Colossians provide a glimpse of what it meant then, and means now, to live faithfully in *Christian community*....

1. The faithful Christian community loves one another. The church at Colossae had won a reputation as a community where Christian love was faithfully demonstrated. Paul wrote: “we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints” (v. 4), and “he [Epaphras] has made known to us your love in the Spirit” (v. 7).

There could be no greater mark of any church than to be known by the love it demonstrates. Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Nancy Ortberg shared an incident in which her daughter’s love and concern for the church community brought conviction to Nancy’s heart: “One evening my oldest daughter came home from Sunday evening worship service. She had been deeply affected by the experience and in response had written on a piece of paper, ‘Lord, help me not to be OK just because everything is OK with me.’

“I was so moved by what she wrote,” said Nancy, that I tacked that piece of paper up on our corkboard in the kitchen as a reminder that in community it is always *we*. In community, if someone else is not OK, then to some degree, I am not OK.” (from *Looking for God*, Tyndale)

This glimpse at the church in Colossae shows us that the faithful Christian community *loves one another*.

2. The faithful Christian community prays for one another. Paul opens the letter by telling the Colossian church: “In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). Not only were prayers of thanks a part of living faithfully in Christian community, Paul’s prayers for the Colossian church also included intercession—specifically, asking God that the Colossian church would be: (1) “filled with the knowledge of God’s will” - v. 9; empowered to “lead lives worthy of the Lord” - v. 10; “made strong” in God’s power - v. 11; and “prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks” - vv. 11 & 12.

The entire prayer section (vv. 9 – 14) is worthy of study. It might be summarized, according to C.F. Moule this way: “Prayer makes two great requests. It asks for the discernment of God’s will and then for the power to perform that will.”

This glimpse at the church in Colossae shows us that the faithful Christian community *loves one another, prays for one another, and...*

3. The faithful Christian community grows in grace with one another. Notice that, in these 14 verses, Paul describes a Christian community marked by its growth in God’s grace. Paul speaks of the Gospel as “bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God” (v. 6). Paul also prays for this community of faith to “bear fruit in every good work” and “grow in the knowledge of God” (v. 10).

I remember Dr. John Ed Mathison, who was pastor of Frazer United Methodist Church in Montgomery, say: In the Christian life “you are either green and growing

or over-ripe and ready to rot.” This is true, Dr. Mathison explained, of the individual Christian life and the life of any church. “You are either green and growing or over-ripe and ready to rot.”

This glimpse at the church in Colossae shows us that the faithful Christian community *loves one another, prays for one another, and grows in grace with one another*. Now, the church at Colossae was not a perfect church. In fact, one of the reasons Paul wrote Colossians was to combat a particular false doctrine with which this church was struggling.

So, we know that the church at Colossae was not a perfect church. There is no such thing. But this church was a church that was faithfully demonstrating what it means to be a community of faith—loving each other, praying for one another, and growing in grace together.

May God help each of us, and the churches of which we are apart, to do the same!

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