

## “Truth That Sets Us free”

Sundays after Pentecost

Colossians 2:6-7

July 25, 2010

A pastor, visiting the coast of Italy, watched the fishermen drag their catch onto the shore. He asked if he could help with the catch. They told him he could if he would lift the fish from the net and place them on the table to be cleaned. After he was done he began to think of this experience as a metaphor for church life and the Christian life. He thought that as long as we place the fish on the table (the problem, the conflict), it can be dealt with. But if we leave the fish in the net or under the table then it will soon spoil, stinking itself and all that is around it. That makes a lot of sense to me.

How often, when faced with a problem or a conflict, we choose to ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist? We excuse ourselves by telling ourselves that “if we mention it, it will only create more problems,” or “if found out people will leave the church,” or “if I talk about it others will know that I am a phony.” We are well versed in our pretense, in our pretending things are ok. We all too often choose to keep the “fish” under the table.

When Paul wrote to the church in Colossae he was writing to confused and bewildered people. The arguments of those schooled in philosophy, human tradition (culture biases), and the like, were upsetting the churchgoers and confusing them about what the truth really was. Their argument was, that those things in life, the things of your culture, which has made a lot of sense to you, are the very things that you should embrace. They denied Jesus and his dying on our behalf. They argued away our broken nature, that which we call sin. And they used logical argument to create mistrust and skepticism among the faithful. No wonder they felt confused.

Ever since the church began there has been a kind of tug-of-war on the people of faith. The two forces that tug at us are the culture and its bias, and God's Word, that which we call the Gospel. These two compete for our allegiance and loyalty. Sometimes the pull can be so great that we feel paralyzed, fearful of making a wrong decision. In our fear we choose not to decide (which is a decision). The confusion remains and our anxiety rises. This apprehension causes us not to name our fear. Perhaps we do so out of fear of rejection, and we end up keeping the “fish” (our fears) under the table. It doesn't take long before they begin to stink up everything.

What seems to be at issue in the Colossian church is that they are allowing a popular, worldview if you will, to describe and define who Jesus is and what Jesus means to/for us. There are some whose understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus means to them is in conflict with what Paul had taught them as to who Jesus is. Paul urges them (the listener/reader) to "continue," "be rooted in," and "abound" in Christ, and this in a particular way, "as you were taught" (2:7). In other words, to stay bound to the truth and do not allow the lie to take over. In other words, “put the fish on the table.”

All too often we have allowed our culture to define Jesus and the truth of who he is and what it means to be a follower of him.

The Bible teaches us that he chose to come and live and die on our behalf. The Bible also tells us that Jesus took our sins and nailed them to the cross. That means he took on the consequences of our sin, not allowing them to keep us apart from God's love, from receiving salvation, and from always connected to God. All this was done without our help and all this was done without any expectation of having to live a certain lifestyle. We call that grace.

And yet our culture wants us to believe that we must do certain things, behave in a certain way, and hold on to a particular set of doctrines in order to be on God's side (this is what Paul meant when he said, "See to it that no one makes a prey of you..."). We embrace the lie. The "fish" remains under the table!

There is also a teaching in many churches today that if we are to be part of God's family we must think alike, believe alike, and act alike. Differences are shunned, questioning is discouraged, we begin to buy in to the culture that tells us if we do question, if we do choose to believe differently then chaos will erupt, divisions will occur, and churches will fall apart. This is the empty deceit and human tradition to which Paul is referring. The "fish" needs to be put on the table.

When the church speaks the truth, when we embrace the grace that has brought us in, when we remain faithful to what we were taught, rooted and built up in Christ, established in faith, we abound in thanksgiving. This happens because the "fish" is put on the table for all to see. Wasn't it Jesus who said "The truth will set you free"?

May we all trust in God's Word, may we live in the truth, and may we commit ourselves to putting the "fish on the table".

AMEN