

New Hope Sermon Col. 1:26-29 – A Mystery Revealed

How many of you have ever been on a treasure hunt? It's a game based on trying to decipher the clues that will eventually lead you to the treasure at the end. Let's pretend we have a treasure hunt here on the church property and see if you can figure each clue out. Each clue leads to the next. So where would you go?

1. Two wheels are better than one.
2. Everyone loves a good bean.
3. This food rhymes with ice.
4. Watching the basketball finals together.
5. M.L. calls it an icebox.
6. Playing with a wooden mallet.
7. Help for the global cook. (the treasure would be a free copy of the church's Manna cookbook!)

A treasure hunt is like an unfolding mystery till you get to the treasure revealed.

God's mysterious plan

The Bible talks a lot about mystery and this thought is in our text today. Paul is called to reveal *"among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Col.1:27

The clues to God's mysteries revealed in Christ are scattered throughout the Old Testament. But Christ's death and resurrection brought God's "mysterious plans" to light and changed history. Listen to what Paul tells the Ephesians:

6this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.^[a] *7* By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

8 Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. *9* I was chosen to explain to everyone^[b] this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.

10 God's purpose in all this was ***to use the church to display his wisdom*** in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. *11* This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. Eph.3:3-11

Notice v. 6: God's mysterious plan was that both Gentiles and Jews who believe in Christ will share as members of God's family together. The Jews would no longer have that privilege alone; they would be joined by people from every other nation in the world. This is possible because of God's amazing act of reconciliation through the cross – no more barriers between Jews and Gentiles, between men and women, between slave and free. All who believe in Christ are reconciled together and become one in Christ. On a global scale this reconciliation is radical and has made possible a peace among warring nations never possible before. Plus, Paul says, that reconciliation is made visible to the world through the church. A treasure of immense proportions for a broken world to discover.

But there's more. On a personal level Paul talks about another mystery in our text in Colossians 1:26-29. I have been thinking a lot this week about what this mystery means for every believer. Listen to the text in the Passion Translation:

"There is a divine mystery—a secret surprise that has been concealed from the world for generations, but now it's being revealed, unfolded and manifested for every holy believer to experience. ²⁷ Living within you is the Christ who floods you with the expectation of glory! This mystery of Christ, embedded within us, becomes a heavenly treasure chest of hope filled with the riches of glory for his people, and God wants everyone to know it! ²⁸⁻²⁹ Christ is our message! We preach to awaken hearts and bring every person into the full understanding of truth. It has become my inspiration and passion

in ministry to labor with a tireless intensity, with his power flowing through me, to present to every believer the revelation of being his perfect one in Jesus Christ.”TPT

The mystery revealed is Christ in you. This has so many wonderful layers of meaning.

The first, according to the verses just previous to these verses, is that as a Christian we are given Christ’s righteousness: ²¹⁻²² *Even though you were once distant from him, living in the shadows of your evil thoughts and actions, he reconnected you back to himself. He released his supernatural peace to you through the sacrifice of his own body as the sin-payment on your behalf so that you would dwell in his presence. And now there is nothing between you and Father God, for he sees you as holy, flawless, and restored,^[a] ²³ if indeed you continue to advance in faith, assured of a firm foundation to grow upon.*

And story after story proves this to be true – sometimes literally:

Ahmed was a Muslim student in North Africa. One day, she read a Christian tract in her dormitory and decided to become a Christian. Her father was an Emir (Islamic ruler), so she expected to lose her inheritance because of her conversion. She was completely unprepared for what happened. When she told her family she had become a Christian and changed her name to Faith, her father exploded in rage. Her father and brothers stripped her naked and bound her to a chair fixed to a metal plate with which they wanted to electrocute her. Faith asked them to at least lay a Bible in her lap. Her father responded, "If you want to die together with your false religion, so be it." One of her brothers added, "That will show that your religion is powerless." Although they had bound her, she was able to touch a corner of the Bible. She felt a strange peace, as though someone were standing beside her.

Her father and brothers pushed the plug into the socket—and nothing happened. They tried four times with various cables, but it was as though the electricity refused to flow. Finally her father, angry and frustrated, hit her and screamed, "You are no longer my daughter."

Then he threw her into the street, naked. She ran through the streets, humiliated and in pain. People looked at her, curious rather than shocked. Shaking and tearful, she ran to a friend. Her friend let her in, clothed her, and gave her shelter. The next day, her friend asked neighbors what they had thought when they had seen Faith running naked through the streets. "What are you talking about?" they asked. "The girl had a wonderful white dress on. We asked ourselves why someone so beautifully clothed had to run through the streets." God had hidden her nakedness from their eyes, clothing her in a beautiful white dress.

Today, Faith is a full-time evangelist with Every Home for Christ. *Guido Kuwas , Global Revival News (12-17-01);*

When Christ comes to live in us, God sees His righteousness when He looks at us. This is what makes us acceptable to Him and part of His family. Our righteousness is like filthy rags. Christ’s righteousness is our perfect covering.

The second fact is that Christ in us makes available to us ALL the wisdom and power and peace and love of God – in us to transform us. Paul says to the Ephesians Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Eph.1:3. Then in ch.3:20 he says”God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or image according to His power in us.” Eph.3:20. Every spiritual blessing. Able to do exceedingly beyond everything we can ask or image – all because we are in Christ.

But do we really get it?

Tim Keller tells the story of an eight-year-old boy whose toy truck breaks.

“He is disconsolate and cries out to his parents to fix it. Yet as he's crying, his father says to him, "A distant relative you've never met has just died and left you one hundred million dollars." What will the child's reaction be? He will just cry louder until his truck is fixed. He does not have enough cognitive capacity to realize his true condition and be consoled.

In the same way, Christians lack the spiritual capacity to realize all we have in Jesus. This is the reason Paul prays that God would give Christians the spiritual ability to grasp the height, depth, breadth, and length of Christ's salvation ([Eph. 3:16-19](#); [Eph. 1:17-18](#)) [and His love!]. In general, our lack of joy is as Shakespeare wrote: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves" (Julius Caesar, Act 1, Scene 2). We are like the eight-year-old boy who rests his happiness in his "stars"—his circumstances—rather than recognizing what we have in Christ. *Tim Keller, Prayer* (Penguin Books, 2016), pages 86-87

What difference does Christ in us make in daily life? In baseball it was the basis for Julio Franco's success:

"On April 21, 2006, 47-year-old Julio Franco became the oldest player in Major League Baseball history to hit a home run. Just a week later, on April 27, he became the oldest player in 97 years to steal a base. With a cloud of skepticism surrounding the sport, Franco's longevity has met suspicion from players and outsiders who doubt that he has stayed in top shape through natural training alone. For example, in 2004, retired outfielder Andy Van Slyke accused Franco of using steroids. Franco's response demonstrated the true source of his remarkable life:

Tell Andy Van Slyke he's right—I'm on the best juice there is. I'm juiced up every day, and the name of my juice is Jesus. I'm on his power, his wisdom, his understanding. Andy Van Slyke is right, but the thing he didn't mention was what kind of steroids I'm on. Next time you talk to him, tell him the steroid I'm on is Jesus of Nazareth. *"It Wasn't All Bad," The Week (5-5-06), p. 2*; "I'm on his power, his wisdom, his understanding" – the best steroid there is!! Don't you love it?!

Paul lived in that similar dependence on Jesus. He ends Colossians one saying "*Him we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom to that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which he powerfully works in me.*" Because of Christ working powerfully in him, he was able to change history, he was able to fulfill his calling, he was able to bring many into the faith and help them grow to maturity. This is what he could do because Christ lived in him.

What are you and I doing because Christ is in us?

Anything is possible but Jesus must have all of us in order for that power and wisdom and love to flow through us. C.S. Lewis said:

Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours." *C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity* (HarperOne, 2001), p. 196-197; That's what it means to have Christ in us. Even His will can become ours.

So how is your life and my life changed today and tomorrow and next year because Christ is in us? What does it mean to believe that He has all the resources you need for everything He has called you to in life? What does it mean that His grace and peace are multiplied to you and in you? How will that affect what you do today? Let's go forth with this marvelous mystery revealed in us, beloved – living the life that is possible because Jesus – our Great Shepherd, the Lord of Lords, the risen, conquering King has taken up residence in us through the Holy Spirit. Nothing is impossible to Him and through Him we are able to do even greater works than He did. Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 7/8/18