

**August 25, 2019**  
**Sermon Manuscript**

Colossians, Part 7: The Gift of our global, catholic Church  
(Colossians 4:2-6)

So we're coming near the end of our journey through Paul's letter to the Church in Colossae, which I expect to wrap up next week before I go away for the middle of September. So today is part seven, and you may have noticed we have a smaller chunk to look at: chapter 4, verses 2 through 6. But before going right into it, I wanted to share how I've been thinking a lot lately about the **global** nature of the gospel; that is, the importance of the gospel for people's across the globe. The news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the availability of his kingdom truly is good news to all people in every nation and culture.

Now, one reason this has been on my mind is, as many of you know, in about ten days I'll be leaving for three weeks to participate in the Anglican Leadership Institute in Martha's Vineyard. And while there I'll be spending time with Anglican clergy from all over the world: from Australia, Ireland, Brazil, India, as well as 9 participants from various African countries; a collection of people who from a worldly or cultural perspective have very little in common, but what we will have in common is Jesus, and our citizenship in God's Kingdom.

But in addition to that, many of you learned this week about the companion relationship that our diocese has just established with the Diocese of Kigezi in Uganda. If you're on the church e-mail list, you received a message about it on Thursday. But if not, I re-printed that information in your bulletin this morning. Well, being from opposite sides of the globe and a context that surely couldn't be more different from ours, some might wonder what use there is in establishing a relationship with them? How could we possibly be of help to one another? What benefits could this really bring?

But one reason I raise this question is because I believe this morning's passage from Colossians points to some answers. Here, Paul is providing the Colossians with some final words of instruction before he gets into the final greetings of his letter, which we'll close the series with next week. And Paul's words here remind us of what we learned back in part 1, that he is writing *to* the Colossian Church from a prison, likely in either Ephesus or Rome, and despite having never actually met any of them or having ever even been to Colossae himself. And we have no evidence that he ever *did* meet them, at least not on this side of glory.

But despite having this physical distance between them that would never be bridged, as we've walked through much of this letter in the first six parts of the series we've undoubtedly detected multiple

ways Paul's writing must have encouraged the Colossians in their discipleship to Christ. In particular, Paul has addressed many issues that were what we might call cultural "blind spots" for the Colossian church. You'll recall...

- There was the unsuspecting attitude toward the influence of false teachers who had been piling spiritual and religious burdens on them - in particular, convincing them they had better commit to certain Jewish observances or engage in angel worship if they wanted to be real Christians
- And some Colossians seem not to have grasped the importance of the daily need for believers to put off the old self of not just sins of the body but sins of the tongue, which can only begin to occur through daily seeking to abide in Jesus - to operate under the authority of His kingdom rule in their lives
- Then in the past two weeks we looked at how Paul presented kingdom values for family and household relationships that would've been in stark contrast to the ways the Colossians would've been used to engaging those relationships - especially for the men - because of the influence of their culture

So what's been evident from the letter are the ways that the specific cultural context of the Colossian Church had produced blind spots and weakness in their faith that were not only harming them spiritually, but harming those they loved, and harming their witness to others. And one reason Paul is able to be so helpful to them is that he is outside of their particular context, therefore he is not necessarily subject to the same influences, and therefore the same blind spots. But Paul is also further along on the path of following Christ. While everyone's journey is unique, he had been following Jesus *a lot* longer than the Colossians had - though it's not so much an issue of time, but instead just that Paul undoubtedly had a greater level of spiritual maturity than any of them - and consequently he possessed some spiritual wisdom and insight that they do not, and that would therefore be beneficial for him to share.

So what this points to *for us* is the great value there is for all Christians to receive encouragement and wisdom from others who are either

- From different cultural contexts than us - so not subject to the same cultural influences as we are, and therefore not suffering from the same spiritual blindspots as we have,

- or receiving from those who are perhaps more mature in their walk with the Lord,
- And if both are true, then all the better

So this highlights one of the potential benefits that could come through our diocese having a relationship with believers on the other side of the world - beginning between our bishops, but in the future it may expand to relationships between parishes - one of the potential benefits is that there may be much we have to learn about the kingdom of God that our Western culture blind us to. And the same goes for this opportunity I have to participate in the Anglican Leadership Institute - where less than half of the clergy are westerners and a full third of them are bishops, and I'm sure well more than a third are more spiritually mature than I am. Just being around them and listening to them talk about their relationship with Christ and learning from them has great potential to expose some of the spiritual blind spots I have or deepen my own walk with the Lord. And certainly any godly impact this could have on me could, in time, then come to impact you as well.

So this is the first way we can be uniquely impacted by believers from other parts of the globe, as the Holy Spirit can use contact with them to further our sanctification in unique ways. But what we can

also see in this passage is a reminder about the power of prayer and that, while Paul's worldly situation in prison may seem to pretty different from the Colossians', because their missions are the same - to expand of God's kingdom through the spreading of the good news and the making of disciples - because their mission is the same, their needs for prayer are actually pretty similar as well.

So in verse 3 Paul asks for the COlossians to pray for him and his fellow workers in prison (quote) " that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ... that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." NOw, when Paul speaks of the need for God to open doors, which could quite literally be referring to the doors of the prison - meaning a request of God to expand his potential impact for the gospel by setting him free, so he can minister to the public. But it's more likely that Paul is desiring for God to figuratively open doors for him through opportunities to share the good news with his fellow prisoners or guards. But wherever these opportunities may come, Paul is expressing his need for God to help him declare the mystery of Christ clearly; in other words, in a way that brings true knowledge and understanding to his hearers.

And verse 5 suggests that Paul perceives the COlossians' need to be much the same as his. He writes, "<sup>5</sup> Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always

be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Paul’s desire is that they might be able to make best use of their time and in particular with their encounters with outsiders - that is, those outside the church - by having speech that is (quote) “gracious (And) seasoned with salt.” Salt was used as both a preserving and flavoring agent, so N.T. Wright suggest Paul is probably referring to speech that would actually make sense to outsiders, and feel relevant to their lives, so that they might be able (as Paul says in verse 6) to “know how (they) ought to answer each person.” Of course, this requires getting to know others, and listening to them, rather than talking at them.

So in order for Paul and the Colossians to make a difference for God’s Kingdom where God has placed them, they are both desperately in need of God’s help. And yet, even though they are separated, they can still **help one another** considerably through prayer. Well, Paul actually began this letter by telling the Colossian in chapter 1 that he and his fellow workers (quote) “have not ceased to pray for (the Colossians), asking that (they) may be filled with the knowledge of (God’s) will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him (and) bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” And now, here in this passage Paul explicitly asks the

Colossians (in verse 3) to pray for him. One of the cool things is about prayer is that it allows us to positively impact the lives of people anywhere in the world; but also, while the spiritual authority of teaching and encouragement may tend to be exercised in one direction - so Paul is writing an authoritative letter teaching the Colossians, but they are not writing back and teaching him - but anybody can pray for anyone else and therefore be of help to them no matter where they may be on their walk with Christ.

So while we may be attempting to expand God's kingdom in a very different contexts from the believers in the Diocese of Kigezi, with very different cultural challenges, both they and us are equally in need of God to open the doors and to give us the words to reveal the mystery of Christ in ways that are relevant to people's lives. And we can support them in that, and they can support us, even from across the globe...through prayer; through praying for God to bless their ministry and open doors to usher in more of His kingdom through them.

So let us not be shy to pray for the Diocese of Kigezi, and petition the Lord to provide a companion relationship with another parish there if that be His will. And let us not be shy in praying for one another - I for you and your for me - during the month of September.



For any such prayers to our good and loving Father can only be a benefit.

In His name, Amen.