

8th Sunday after Pentecost
July 10, 2016
Colossians 1:1-14
Fruits of Faith Begin with Redemption
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus, God's Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins:

You are not a Christian by your own choosing. God the Father has qualified you by calling you to saving faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Paul recognized it was only God's will that also made him "an apostle of Christ Jesus." No longer a persecutor of the church, Paul counted among his brothers in the faith the believers in Colossae in Asia Minor. Concerned about their spiritual welfare, the apostle wrote them from his jail cell in Rome.

He began his letter with a truth. It is the truth of our Christian faith and life. **Fruits of Faith Begin with Redemption.** God the Father has qualified us to share his inheritance. Faith and love spring from the hope stored up for us in heaven.

Have you ever had to qualify? Maybe you had to run a preliminary race in a certain time, or come in first or second to qualify for the finals. Or, qualify for interest in your savings account by having and keeping a particular balance at all times. You can think of other examples, I'm sure.

Think if you had to qualify "to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." You must be sinless by nature to qualify. You must never have broken God's will with an evil thought, a hurtful word, or an unkind action. You must love God above all things and your neighbor, even your enemy, without fail and without condition. Sorry, none of us qualifies to inherit the kingdom of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The good news, the gospel, is that we do not have to qualify by our own righteousness. God has qualified us, Paul wrote. God the Father has rescued us from the dominion of the darkness of our sin, guilt and unbelief. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He has given us that Son's work of redemption, the forgiveness of our sins through his righteous sacrifice on the cross. The greatest inheritance we possess is our redemption in Christ.

This redemption has qualified us as "the holy and faithful brothers" Paul addressed. We could substitute "believing" for faithful. God's grace is not conditional. It is, however, regulated. There is a vast difference. God is not willing that anyone should perish but that all come to repentance. [2 Peter 3:9] God does not, however, for the reason he is just too nice refrain from sending those who reject his grace to hell.

We believers, we "saints," do not share God's inheritance of redemption in Christ in the same way heirs must share an earthly inheritance, i.e. they must divide it up among them. Each of us has received full redemption in Christ. My baptism gives me all the kingdom of light not merely a portion of it. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world who has rescued me from the dominion of darkness. I have every spiritual blessing in Christ as do each of you.

The Colossians had heard this gospel through Epaphras. Today, "All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

The gospel, our redemption, is growing our faith and bearing fruit. As Christians, we have the living hope of the fullness of our inheritance in eternal life. This is not the denial of reality. It is the truth that enables us to bear our crosses. It motivates us to carry out faithfully our daily

vocations and callings. This is what it means to “live a life worthy of the Lord.” It is a life in keeping with the great gift of our redemption in Christ.

Paul prayed, and pastors pray for God’s people that the Lord fill you with knowledge that comes from spiritual wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is wisdom “in the Spirit,” wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives. It is not feeling spiritual. People can feel spiritual and continue to do things that are contrary to God’s Word. When we live a life worthy of the Lord, that life pleases him in every way because it agrees with his will and Word.

An art critic once described a painting by Monet as “overwhelmingly beautiful.” He went on to say he was not saying how the painting merely made him feel when he looked at it. He said it made him want to live part of his life devoted to it. He wanted to know it better, to understand it better. He wanted to contemplate what seeing it had accomplished for his life in the future.

This is the approach we want to use with our redemption in Christ Jesus. Fruits of faith begin with redemption. The gospel produces faith and then the fruits of faith. Those fruits of faith are not feelings but a change in the way I live for the Lord that may please him in every way.

Redemption in Christ is about now wanting to devote my entire life to the author and finisher of my redemption, Jesus Christ. It is about wanting to know Jesus better, to understand his redemption more completely. Redemption is knowing what having seen the overwhelming beauty of Jesus’ cross and empty tomb will do to my life in the future here on earth and in heaven.

The radiance of redemption in Christ causes faith to grow like the sun’s rays cause plants to grow healthy and strong. And as plants reach up to the sun, so our faith reaches up to the hope of our inheritance we have stored up for us in heaven as saints in the kingdom of light.

May God grant you that knowledge and wisdom in the Spirit, that right comprehension, and that appropriate application of redemption in your lives. Amen. <SDG>