

Colossians 1:21-2:7
The Beauty of Blistered Feet
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This is now the third message in a series, in which we're looking at Paul's Colossian letter. What I hope we will see, even more than the evidence FOR Jesus, is the result of a life WITH Jesus and what it means for us as a community. Jesus IS molding and shaping this community, Jesus is molding and shaping you—whether you know it or not, and whether you like it or not—into the person you were created to be.

Last week, we looked at the way in which Jesus is and can be for us personally the central figure around which our lives can turn. Paul uses this beautiful theological phrase that Jesus is the image of the invisible God—which means, if you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. Jesus is the firstborn of creation, and it's on this point that we're going to delve more deeply today.

When the disciple women came to the tomb that first Easter only to find it empty, what they experienced was the first example, as John, the writer of Revelation says, of God making all things new. Resurrection, new creation began on Easter, and that's what we are going to build upon today.

But before we do let's join in a word of prayer. *Let the good news come now, O God, not only in word, but in power and in full assurance, that because Jesus is alive and at work in our world, our lives can be awakened and enlivened to his new and great purposes for us. Holy Spirit, speak to us, and may the words I utter, and the thoughts I reflect upon be yours. And if any of them are not of you, may they vanish from our memory so that all that remains is the pure, holy, life transforming Words of the living Christ, our rock and redeemer. Amen.*

I want to invite you to open your pew Bibles or the Bible you brought with you to Colossians chapter 1 once more. Don't worry, by the end of today, we will be on to chapter 2. If you're following along in the red Bibles, it can be found on page 184 of the New Testament. And out of respect and reverence for the Word of God, would you please stand as you are able and listen to the Word of the Lord.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for

you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

You know, some of the most difficult times we face as human beings come when we lose sight of our purpose, when we miss the big picture, or the forest from the trees, when the main thing is no longer the main thing. Looking at our passage from Psalm 1 that Maggie read, we can become like trees with shallow roots that are easily blown around. Our work can become repetitive and mundane, our families can get caught in the rut of just getting by and not really thriving together, our church can become a place where we just sleepwalk through a liturgy and worship that is no longer within earshot of the falconer, Jesus.

The Apostle Paul is keenly aware of this danger, and he is addressing it in the beginning verses of this week's text. You see, Paul is not only the great theologian and teacher of the early church; he's also a great historian. Paul doesn't want the people to forget their story; he doesn't want them to forget where they've been. Historical and cultural amnesia is a dangerous thing.

This is one thing that stories can do for us: they can take us from simply the recipients of information and invite us into the living, breathing, ongoing narrative. And as the one who was schooled in the Torah, a Pharisee of Pharisees, Paul the Great Missionary to the Gentiles knew that his message hinged upon God inviting us to see our lives as a part of God's ongoing story in the world. **You who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him**

But something happened roughly 250 years ago. There were a few European guys, like Rousseau, Voltaire, and a chap we're familiar with, Thomas Jefferson, who decided that they were going to do history and construct a society around ideas that are rational, observable, quantifiable, etc. They wanted to build their society around what was logical

and rational. So for them, this idea that there was an overarching story or a narrative that would provide a framework for their lives didn't work for them. This is what has come to be known as the dawn of modernism in the world. For them, God, if he was anywhere, was way out there, while down here the world is run by the modern democracy and logical thinking people. So for the next few hundred years, art and literature and culture etc were all guided by this modern thought process that said humans were capable of running the world themselves, thank you very much. But by the mid twentieth century, this notion begins to break down with the events of World War II and the dawn of nuclear technology and weapons. This is what the presence of sin does. It takes something, even something that might be good like democracy and science, and it corrupts it and turns it into its opposite. And this is what happened with modernist thought. All the lofty ideals it presented were simply turned on their heads because humans are innately sinful.

And so what happened was that the modernist dream that because we're rational we can now solve all the world's problems never came true. And there was a shift from the big stories like rationalism that have let us down, and we now want to cherish and rediscover the little stories—not as an illustration, but as a way of making sense of our world.

Now why did I say all of that? Well, because one of the things that history has taught us is that relying on these modern ways of thinking to be the center just haven't worked—we haven't created a perfect society. Our lives and our culture is full of struggle and dysfunction. And because of that, we need a center, a guiding story. And what the Apostle Paul is telling the people of Colossae and the people of the 21st century is that God's story is the one that can help us make sense of our lives. God's story is the one around which our lives can turn.

God's story does two things. First, it tells us the truth about ourselves. Verse 21 puts it this way: **we were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.** Check. Pretty sure that much is as obvious to us now as it was to them.

Ok, Paul, so we've spent thousands of years with this problem. We've put our brightest minds on the case to figure it out, and we still don't have the answer—we thought we did, but the 20th century didn't pan out the way we hoped it would.

Second, we see the direction God's story is leading. Verse 22 continues, **he (Jesus) has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard from me.**

Jesus reconciles, with his death, to change the course of our story. This word reconcile is a really interesting one. It's the Greek word *Katalydzō*, where we get the word catalyst. Are there any chemistry majors in the room? If you remember from science, what does a catalyst do? It changes the properties of everything else around it while keeping its own form. When Jesus Christ emerged into history, everything changed. We see it throughout the Gospels from the very beginning. Mary, while she was with child, visits her cousin

Elizabeth and the child within her leaps at the presence of Jesus. As a boy, Jesus went into the temple, the place where the Pharisees and the Sadducees were, opened the scroll and spoke from the prophet Isaiah, “**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, sight to the blind and release of the captives.**” And it drove the people in the synagogue nuts; this wasn’t the fulfillment they had in mind.

Jesus, in John 8, met a woman who was about to be stoned by her accusers for having flaws like any of us, and steps onto the scene and, with a few words and a doodle in the sand, transformed the lives of every person there. Especially the woman, who for all intents and purposes was expecting death, but instead received grace.

To the man who was crucified by his side, who recognized the face of love looking mercifully upon him and, as he remained there dying, turned his life over and received the greatest gift...eternal life today.

That’s what happens when Jesus the reconciler, Jesus the *katalydzio*, the catalyst enters our lives—we change, he remains the faithful constant. Now all of a sudden our story, as good or bad as it is, gets caught up, entwined in Jesus’ story of redemption. All of a sudden our lives become a part of God’s story. And the culmination of that story is not, as some would have us believe, with all sorts of people vanishing in an instant and blissfully float up into the clouds. No, Paul knew that the end of God’s story is a new creation. It is as John the writer of Revelation tells us at the very end of the Bible when he sees the new heaven, God’s holy city, coming down and being established here on earth among women and men. When Jesus rose from the dead, that new reality, that culmination began, and is taking place even now simultaneously eternity and the present overlap, heaven and earth are existing side by side moving towards God’s final culmination when the mortal, when that which is perishing, will give way to the imperishable, and death will be swallowed up in life, as he says in 1 Corinthians 15, and God’s kingdom will be among man. It doesn’t say that God is going to take us all away and get rid of this pesky world with all of its shortcomings. No, it says that the good God is in the process of recreating his good creation, starting with Jesus, and including you and me. That is our story. Jesus the catalyst for recreated life. He reveals what the recreated world will look like. We see it in his life.

And so that is why Paul, though out the end of chapter one and on into the first few verses of chapter two, writes that he rejoices in his suffering for the church, he presses on in his struggles, he is strengthened in his labor of love. He knows that through it all, he is revealing the majesty and the mystery of knowing Jesus and being a part of God’s kingdom here and now. That when we struggle on behalf of the gospel, it is never in vain, but it is always revealing—ever so slightly—the beauty of that kingdom.

The writer J. Oswald Sanders tells the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement, he came to a certain village to share the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay

down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke, people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The leader of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that his suffering must have meant something and that they had been wrong to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

Filled up with the afflictions and suffering of Jesus, this missionary ushered in eternity into that indigenous village, all because in his blistered feet they saw a life that was rooted so deeply in love, feet that were worn and weathered from a life that had been poured out in service, and filthy with the soot and soil of the very earth that Jesus the catalyst of grace was at work redeeming.

So I ask you, how is your root system? Is it dry and shallow, or does it sink down deeply into the aquifer of the Savior? Is it feeling around the surface looking for a momentary respite, or is it grounded, nourished, and sustained by the one who will strengthen you in all things?