

Dear Children of God: Part 2

To: Church@UMCmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Who emails anymore? Well, some do, of course. Paul and other epistle writers would have used any method of communication to share the message they brought. Maybe we can think of email as a place to enlarge the conversation. We can go a little deeper, invite serious thinking, and seek input and responses to the ideas and plans put forth. Is it possible to hear the gospel as an invitation to engage in dialog? Are we allowed to ask questions and consider the implications and applications of what we read or hear? Certainly! That's what it means to be engaged as the "Dear Children of God."

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – *Heard of this Hope*

July 13, 2025

[Colossians 1:1-14](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Sometimes, the Pauline epistles feel like we're picking up in the middle of a conversation or perhaps an email thread. Whatever came before or after, we get only this one snapshot of the stories, events, and questions that exist between the author and the community. Today's passage gives us more information than most, though, about the community itself. Paul pulls back the curtain and tells us not only about the Colossians' reputation as Christ followers, but also names Epaphras, a minister who lives in Colossae and writes to Paul about the church there.

Do you ever wonder what your people might write to someone else about your church? Would your lay leader send an email to the district superintendent about meetings full of discernment and listening for God's direction? Would the octogenarian in the front pew write about delightful moments of joy in worship? Would your trustees' chair write to a family member about the woes of keeping the building afloat? Would the missions' chair send out a note about all the ways the building gets used during the week? Would your volunteer pastoral care team tell about a year full of funerals?

During this series, we will offer a prompt each week to help those gathered write down the story of your church—not the history, mind you, but the story—or maybe the stories. The little things that demonstrate where the church is faithfully following and where it's still a work in progress. You could put the prompt on social media earlier in the week or present it after the sermon, giving everyone paper and a pen and holding space with quiet music for people to write their responses. Invite them to keep the paper to themselves or to place it in the offering plate if they are willing to share it with the community. Gather any shared responses during each week of the series and find a way to share them with the church, either on social media, in a newsletter, or even incorporated into the sermon the following week.

For week 1, the writing prompt is: **Where do you encounter hope in this church community?**

PREACHING NOTES

We continue in the epistles for part two of the “Dear Children of God” series, asking what message we need to hear today and in what format. An email now seems quaint as it was once cutting-edge. Yet, it still gives space to tell a story, explain a situation, or unpack a thought.

To help us, we have the first fourteen verses from the letter to the Colossians. This little letter will be our guide for this second part of the series. Not considered one of the highlights of the New Testament, it is nonetheless useful for our purposes. There is some debate as to whether Paul wrote this epistle. Frankly, I don’t know either. But I’ll take the easy way and talk about Paul anyhow. It seems simpler that way.

We are in the first chapter of the letter. The usual greetings begin the letter, and then the promise of prayers takes the stage. In those prayers is the call to live—a life of fruitfulness, presence, and hope in Christ. “You have heard of this hope,” Paul writes. It is as if he were saying, “You know this; you’ve walked in this; this hope is what motivates you and defines you. It is a part of you.”

Then, there is a reference and commendation to another leader, Epaphras, a pastor who taught, cared for, and helped the community in Colossae and is now the source of information for Paul. Or is he the one writing this letter?

Then, he picks up the missive with a transition. “For this reason” is not a beginning place. It is not the launch of a journey or the start of an adventure. Rather, it is more like continuing. Another day, another step, just keep going.

“For this reason” means what Paul heard about them. He heard that they loved one another and that they loved him in the Spirit. He heard that they bore fruit, that they served and helped and healed and taught. He heard that they lived lives worthy of the gospel. And because of that, because of the love that lived in them and came forth from them, Paul praised God for them and asked that God continue to pour into them all that they needed to live. Paul prayed that they might have wisdom and understanding, the knowledge of God’s will and that they would keep growing and moving forward.

But it was the middle verse and a bit that caught my attention. “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father...” (v.11-12a). Some words in there describe the life of the ordinary Christian, at least as I understand it. These words put the hope into action in each life. They incarnate hope, we might say.

First, Paul prays for them to be strong. *May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power.* Wow, all the strength that God’s power can bestow! All the strength. God’s glorious power is for changing the world, isn’t it? It is for mighty deeds and feats of faithfulness that take the breath away of any onlooker. Be strong with all the strength. Superman level here.

So, what is to be done with this strength? “*Endure with patience.*” Wait, what? Endure? If you’ve got all the glorious power of God, all the strength that comes from him, you’re going to do more than endure, aren’t you? Endure sounds like surrender. Endure sounds like put up with, outlast, tolerate, wade through, stomach - as in, “I’ve got to stomach this medicine that’s horrible but good for me.” Endure. But

then Paul makes it worse: endure with patience. Yikes, we can't even grumble about our messy, unfair, heavy, and burdensome lives. We've got to endure with patience.

But he doesn't stop there. Endure with patience while joyfully giving thanks. Oh, my heavens. Endure and be joyful? Is such a thing possible? I mean, I know how to endure and let everyone know I'm enduring, looking for brownie points or sympathy. But now, I'm supposed to endure and be joyful? I'm supposed to endure without dwelling on the burden, but giving thanks for life, giving thanks with joy? How is that supposed to happen?

By remembering whose we are. By remembering who is with us. Joyfully giving thanks to God means being aware of that presence. It means remembering the hope of which we have heard. It means knowing that we are not alone, not forgotten, not abandoned. Joyfully giving thanks to God means that we know that our help comes from the hills, as the Psalm says, the hills where God dwells. *I lift up my eyes.* Enduring with patience and joy means being able to lift up your eyes.

We are also reminded that this presence is most often felt through the community of faith around us. That's the inheritance of the saints of light, not just those who have gone before, but those who are around us every day, every week, when we gather to sing God's praise and bask in God's glory—the glory that shines from the faces of the faithful who walk with us every single ordinary day.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, are you listening? Have you noticed? God has planted seeds of hope among us.

We have heard of this hope!

Are you listening? Have you noticed? God nurtures hope among us, helping us bear the fruit of faithfulness in this world.

We seek this hope as we learn to live in faith.

Are you listening? Have you noticed? The hope of God's good news forms you to love one another with the love of Christ.

We cling to this hope as we grow in love of God, self, neighbor, and all creation.

Children of God, come! Come, let us worship God who graciously offers us the gift of hope.

Come, let us worship God who empowers us to put our hope into faithful and loving actions!

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2025.

Prayer for the Day

Holy God, we come together to worship,
a people who would like to think that we love you
with all our hearts and souls,
with all our might,

but there are so many other things in our lives
that clamor for our attention
that we often relegate you to Sundays
and Wednesdays,
and times when we want you to rescue us.

Most of us really do want you to be the one
in whom we live and move and have our being.
We really do want to listen to your voice
above all of the other voices in our lives.
But we get bogged down in the daily routine.
We forget who we are.
We forget who you are.
We forget what the church is supposed to be.

So here we are, gathered before you today,
with our human foibles
and our short attention spans,
asking that you would make yourself known to us,
that you would help us to recognize
the presence of the Holy,
that you would continue to challenge us,
inspire us, and make us into the people you want us to be.

Amen.

*Adapted from Katie Cook, in Sacred Seasons, Pentecost/Ordinary Time 2000. Posted on **Simple Living Works**, <http://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=archives/>*

Articles/WorshipAltItems3.php. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/06/opening-invocation-for-ordinary.html>.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious and Merciful God, your love is steadfast, and your mercy endures forever. Forgive us for not loving as you love. Forgive us for the ways and words we've used to oppress your people and help us to forgive those who've oppressed us. Forgive us for the deeds that we've done that have burdened instead of uplifted the hearts and minds of those we've encountered. Forgive us for silence during times of

injustice and free us to rise and advocate for those who live under the leadership of unjust rulers, who live in a state of turmoil and depression. Help us to reconcile and make peace with one another. Help us to bear one another's burdens and to be agents of your liberating love so that all of your people will be able to live justly. We confess our sins before you silently now, knowing that you are willing to able to cleanse and revive us through Christ's resurrecting power, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Written by Stacey Cole Wilson, The Africana Worship Book, Year C (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 150.

Benediction

Children of God, remember: you are not alone! This hope you have heard is the hope that draws us together to co-create a world where hope becomes reality. Go now in the blessing of the Triune God, the Source and Sustainer of our hope, to share the love of God wherever you go. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2025.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – *Image of the Invisible*

July 20, 2025

[Colossians 1:15-28](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Most of my early memories of singing happened in church. I joined the children's choir when I was three and a half. I sang and clapped enthusiastically every time we ended a service with "You Shall Go Out with Joy," and I joined in loud and proud when we sang "Amazing Grace," because I knew all the words early in life. I was a child who loved to sing, and church, for me, equaled singing. Even if you didn't have quite that level of enthusiasm for singing in church as a child, I imagine it would be hard to recall a worship service that didn't include singing. As United Methodists, singing is in our DNA. As worship planners, you select hymns and songs every week that are meaningful to your congregation and tie into the theology and themes of that day's scripture(s). We spend a lot of time focused on the content of our singing, but not necessarily on the act of singing itself. Singing together is what some call a "mega-mechanism for bonding." When we sing together, we align our breath and our focus toward the same goal, which, in the case of worship, is praising God and declaring what we believe to and with one another. In other words, it's not just what we sing, but that we sing in worship that forms us.

In this week's text, Paul draws on the power of communal singing by quoting a hymn about Christ in the middle of his letter to the Colossians. Note that I said, "a hymn." Scholars are fairly certain this song was sung in communal worship, not unlike "Amazing Grace" or "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow." When faced with plumbing the depths of the Incarnation, Paul turned to song. And through that song, Paul demonstrates what the image of the invisible means for us as the church, the body of Christ. In the extraordinary and the mundane, Christ came, and so, in the extraordinary and the mundane, we are called to embody Christ to the world with one another.

As noted last week, during this series, we will offer a prompt each week to help those gathered write down and tell the story of your church, planted and growing and sharing the gospel in your particular community. You might consider putting the prompt on your social media page(s) earlier in the week or presenting it after the sermon, giving everyone paper and a pen and holding space with quiet music while people write down their responses. Invite congregants to keep the paper to themselves or to place it in the offering plate if they are willing to share it with the community. Gather any shared responses during each week of the series and find a way to share them with the church, either on social media, in a newsletter, or even incorporated into the sermon the following week.

For week 2, the writing prompt is: **How have you experienced God's love and presence when you sing and pray together in this church community?**

PREACHING NOTES

While not giving Charles Wesley a run for his title, Paul was something of a hymn writer—or a hymn quoter. Some scholars think these doxologies were already being used, and Paul just wove them into his writing, as I might quote a popular song or newspaper article. But whether he wrote these words or chose them to make his point, Paul is giving us a hymn of praise to Christ here in the early part of the letter to the Colossians. Jesus is the “He” referred to in verse fifteen, if that was not already obvious. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Perhaps these words inspired John to open his Gospel with a similar tune and chorus. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him. That’s John’s version of this song of praise, this doxology. It sounds similar.

It goes on from this declaration at the beginning to describe the place, the status, the power of Christ and the beginnings of Trinitarian theology. “For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.” All the fulness. True God of true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father...” It makes your head spin to try to comprehend it. Maybe that is part of the purpose: to make our heads spin. A little head spinning is good for us, not for confusion’s sake, but to open us to the wonder of Christ, to the power of God. What an incredible, certainly not ordinary, thing God chose to do—to put on flesh and walk among us, to enter into our reality, our brokenness, so that we would know God understands; so that we would know God feels our pain and knows our weakness. We would know that God is not some distant force, but an intimate presence right here. “Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Head spinning, indeed.

Wait. I mean, good for him and all. But what about the ordinary? The everyday? The moments that pass by almost unnoticed until we with a great act of will force ourselves to wake up, to pay attention to each breath, each encounter? How do we open our eyes to those passing moments, so that they don’t pass unheeded? How do we stop and acknowledge those we love in front of us, the ones who make our hearts pound even if we forget to pay attention to the pounding from time to time? How do we grab the ones slipping out of our grasp before we even see it? How do we hang on to this moment long enough to let those around us know that we are who we are because they are in our lives, they came to bless us, they came to shape us, they came to love us even in our most unlovable? We’ve missed too many moments. They disappear too quickly, and by the time we pay attention to them, they are gone, and the chance was missed. How do we wake up to the ordinary?

With magic. Ordinary magic. That’s the image of the invisible. Not sleight-of-hand magic, or flamboyant otherworldly magic. Ordinary magic—the invisible connection between us, around us, before us always. When I was a kid, there was a presence that still resides in my memory who told us to remember the magic. Every morning, Captain Kangaroo would gently open our eyes to the world around us, and he concluded every program with the admonition to remember the magic words, “please and thank you.” Yeah, I’m old. But the Captain was followed by others – Mr. Rodgers, Steve from *Blues Clues*, Clunette on the *Big Comfy Couch*. So many. Who is it now? *Paw Patrol*? *Bluey*? Who is telling our kids, telling us, about ordinary magic? Who is reminding us that ordinary magic is *gratitude*. Gratitude reminds us of our connection, our reliance on those around us to make our lives meaningful. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for feeding me, for clothing me, for making me laugh, and for holding me while I cry. Thank you for being there for me. And, wonder of wonders, thank you for wanting to.

I'm amazed at Paul's hymn here in Colossians. Amazed at the wonder of who Christ is, yes. But really amazed at the end. After all, this is about God in Christ. It ends with the words that this whole thing, this whole wonderful, amazing, head-spinning thing, was so that you and I could find our way home to the arms of God. "Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things." All things, you and me. To himself, to God, himself. We are brought back into relationship. And this is the best part: He was pleased to do it. He was pleased to bring me home. God was pleased to bend down and lift me up. God was pleased to hold the door, to stand watch at the end of the lane so that he could run to greet me when I came to myself and stumbled home. This wasn't a duty born out of the nature of God. This wasn't just in the job description. No, we are made right, brought home, welcomed into the loving arms of our Father, nurtured by our Mother in heaven because God was pleased to do so. Pleased by us. By you. By me. God was pleased.

The image of the invisible. Magic. Thank you. Thank you, God. Thank you who stand in for God from time to time, who carry the ordinary moments of our lives and make them rich and deep and full. It is the ordinary days that need cultivation and attention. Such days are what we harvest in our lifetimes. Amen I say, amen. And that cultivation and attention is the ordinary magic of gratitude—first to God and from there into everywhere. Thank you for who you are.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, in Jesus, Love became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.

We gather to worship Christ, the image of the invisible.

In Jesus, we meet the fullness of God with no barriers to access.

We gather to worship Christ, the image of the invisible.

In Jesus, our separation from God, neighbor, self, and creation has been removed. We are free for divine and loving connection once again.

We gather to worship Christ, the image of the invisible.

Children of God, come! Come, let us worship God, whose power makes Love visible to us so that we might reflect Love to the world.

Come, let us worship Christ, Love who came to dwell among us and within us!

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2025.

Prayer of Intercession

O Christ, your cross speaks both to us and to our world.

In your dying for us,

You accepted the pain and hurt of the whole of creation.

The arms of your cross stretch out

Across the broken world in reconciliation.

You have made peace with us.

Helps us to make peace with you

By sharing in your reconciling work.

May we recognize your spirit

Disturbing and challenging us to care for creation

And for the poor who most feel the effects of its abuse.

O Christ, the whole of creation groans.

Set us free and make us whole. Amen.

*From the Iona Community's Iona Abbey Worship Book (Wild Goose Publications, Iona Community, 2001).
Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/10/prayer-of-intercession-colossians-1-15.html>.*

Prayer of Confession

Let us open our hearts and minds to the truth of our lives, and let us offer that truth to God.

Offer silent prayers of confession..

Forgive us, O God, when we limit you –

When we remake you in our image,

When we claim our causes as your own,

When we box you in,

And explain you away,

And in our attempts at understanding, whittle away all mystery.

Forgive us for our human impulses, and change us:

Awaken us to your glory,

Confound us by your love,

Shower us with grace so that we will be made new,

Recreated in your image,

Grateful for all that we cannot know.

In the name of Christ, who brought us closer to you, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, let us proclaim the Good News:

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Let us go out into the world as people made new by God.

Alleluia! Amen.

*Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission.
<https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession/>.*

Benediction

Go now in the blessing of Christ, the image of the invisible, Love-made-flesh. May God's loving presence surround you on every side, guiding you and empowering you to share God's loving presence with everyone you meet. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2025.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – *Made You Alive*

July 27, 2025

[Colossians 2:6-15, \(16-19\)](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

“I feel alive”: something we exclaim after an invigorating dunk in cold water, soaring through the air on a hang glider, or feeling the rush of wind as we tip over the edge of that first big hill on a roller coaster. Funny how none of these involve sitting quietly and contemplating deep and heady things. As much as I love a good theological or philosophical rabbit trail, sitting and cogitating, as my grandmother would say, has a way of drawing my focus away from the body instead of toward it. And it seems that to feel alive, we have to be in our bodies, feeling and experiencing the world around us with our whole selves.

Now, given all of this, you may be thinking that we’re attempting a fool’s errand if we want to help people feel alive in the context of worship. Certainly, most of our worship spaces are devoid of ice-cold water, hang gliders, or loop-di-loops. But perhaps that’s not necessarily the point of worship. Worship is about pointing to God, who made us alive, who created and redeems us, who gave us the whole of ourselves and gives us grace to experience our aliveness in God and with one another. We don’t have to produce a spectacle to manufacture feelings and hype in our congregation. Honestly, nothing we could say or do or create can come close to encountering the Triune God who gives and sustains life for all creation.

Now, you might be thinking, then why try? And that’s a completely understandable question, but possibly not the best question. We’re not in competition with God here, nor are we trying to get God’s attention. One of my all-time pet peeves is when a worship service begins with, “Let us invite God into the space.” God doesn’t need to be invited! God is already there because God is all-present. There’s no place we can go that God is not already there. Gathered worship is about attuning us as individuals and as a community to recognize God in our midst and to learn to follow what God is already doing. We don’t need to manufacture spectacle or hype up emotions. We just need to be honest about God and bring the best of ourselves in worship of God—both in planning worship and in the communal act itself.

During this series, we offer a prompt each week to help your community write down and tell the story of your church, alive and being made alive in your particular community. You might want to put the prompt on your social media page(s) earlier in the week or present it after the sermon, giving everyone paper and a pen and holding space with quiet music while people write their responses. Invite congregants to keep the paper to themselves or to place it in the offering plate if they are willing to share it with the community. Gather any shared responses and find a way to share them with the church, either on social media, in a newsletter, or even incorporated into the sermon the following week.

For week 3, the writing prompt is: **How have you encountered God in the fullness of who you are—body, mind, and spirit—in this church community?**

PREACHING NOTES

“How your email found me.” You’ve seen those memes. I’m sure. Some image of someone hiding, beaten up, drowning, or in some desperate situation and the words, “How your email found me” scrawled across the border. Is it a commentary on the average worker’s state of mind or a nod to the shallow state of corporate etiquette that causes an email to begin, “I hope this email finds you well”? Or maybe, it’s just a bit of fun, and to overanalyze it is to ruin the joke. Yeah, that one, most likely.

But Paul, or whoever wrote the letter to the Colossians, really means it when he says, “I hope this email finds you well.” And to prove that he really means it, he doesn’t just hope we are well, he tells us how we are. Like a doctor who can diagnose you from a distance, he reads your vitals in ways that no one ever has before. Like a counselor who knows the secrets in your inner being, knows your past and your hang ups and your potential, he sets your feet on a path that will lead to your flourishing. Now you’re wondering how he knows you that well, and you can’t help but be skeptical. There are far too many people who think they know you when they don’t. Too many people who think they can read your soul, know your thoughts, and then prescribe just what you need to be better, stronger, smarter, prettier, whatever. We’re right to be skeptical.

If you take another look at the text, however, even if you include the extended bit (verses 16-19), you’ll see that Paul isn’t asking us to do anything except stay the course. No, he isn’t selling anything here. The text is an invitation to see what has already been done; to see yourself through the eyes of the one who loved you more than you can comprehend. Here’s the secret, however: Paul doesn’t know you. But he knows that one, the one who loves you, the one who made you alive.

That is the life we are called to keep living: the alive life. That is what we all want, isn’t it? To be alive. Not just living, but alive. And this email, this letter, finds us alive. That’s what Paul is saying as he writes. But he wants us to be aware of this life, this aliveness. He wants us to embrace the gift we’ve been given, to live to our potential as fully alive ones. He wants us to be rooted in the teaching, in the knowledge of the faith shared by so many and in so many ways. We become more aware of that rootedness when we live a life of gratitude. “Abounding in thanksgiving” is how Paul describes it. The fully alive person knows what is owed to others, knows how interwoven we all are. That’s one of the marks of being fully alive – gratitude.

Living this indebtedness allows us to be strong in our faith, to hold fast to those roots. It will be harder to be taken captive by deceit and worldly philosophies. This doesn’t mean, however, that we won’t need to learn and grow in our faith, understanding, and wisdom. It isn’t about being calcified in belief or opinion, but about holding on to certain truths while encountering an ever-changing world and growing deeper in understanding what it means to be fully alive in Christ.

What doesn’t change is the fundamental understanding that we have been redeemed. Actually, Paul (or someone!) argues it much more powerfully by saying that we have been raised from the dead. That, of course, ties into the theme of being made alive. We were dead, and now we are alive. While there is drama in that process, we don’t have to make it a production. Yes, there are those whose redemption stories are dramatic, and we are stirred by the transformation that takes place in their lives. The edge of the cliff rescue, the come back from addiction or disaster are powerful stories of the power of faith and new life and need to be shared when and where they can.

Yet, each one made alive is worth celebrating. There are many sitting in your sanctuaries who haven't had a dramatic conversion event and, therefore, might be led to believe that their experience is not as significant, not as testimony-worthy. They may even question whether they have claimed the aliveness that Colossians talks about. But, of course, every life, every transformation is worth celebrating. You were made alive! You! And let's not overlook the daily transformation that takes place when we once again claim the Christ who loved us into life. In response to those who might ask, "When were you saved?" we can sincerely say, "This morning! Again." We are continually being saved, being transformed into life.

In the end, our text argues, the only thing that brings this aliveness is the Christ at work in us. There are various practices, however, that can open our eyes and hearts to that divine work within us. But the key word here is *various*. Some disciplines have long histories of effectiveness; some practices are needed to bring a sense of belonging and community, and others are uniquely suited to various personality types. But none are transformative in and of themselves. Paul argues against those who say you must engage in this practice or perform those disciplines to be a "true" follower of Jesus. These practices are good and helpful and healing, but they are not the substance of our faith. The substance, says Paul, belongs to Christ (*Col 2:17 NRSV*). Our call is to hold fast to the head, to Christ, in all things. And then to know life, abundant life.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, when the journey ahead seems long and hard, full of unknown dangers and all-too-real risks, remember:

Keep the faith. God, who made us alive, is our Guardian and Guide.

When the voices on the side of the road tempt us with their misinformation full of unearned certainty, simple solutions, and quickness to blame and shame those who disagree with them, remember:

Stay the course. God, who made us alive, is our Wisdom and Judge.

When those in power place barriers in our way, making it harder to share the love of God in our communities, trying to convince us it is easier to do nothing than remain firm in God's call to act for the flourishing of all our neighbors, remember:

Do not be afraid. God, who made us alive, is our Strength and our Advocate.

Children of God, come! Let us worship God, whose persistent love empowers us to persevere, to stay the course, to live by faith and not fear.

Come, let us worship God, who makes us alive, through grace to love and serve God and one another.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, February 2025.

Prayer of Intercession

Just God, we sense your anger at the injustice that thrives in the world. We share your grief at the discord that rages among your children, the rejection of those who bear your image, and the oppression of those you know by name. We turn toward you for strength and guidance to turn away from the norms of this world, the lure of self-righteousness, and the appeal of comfort over justice. Embolden us to believe that another world is possible and empower us to participate in its creation. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, Copyright 2022 Faith INFO Ministry Team.

<https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/after-pentecost-c-july-24-2022/>.

Prayer of Confession

We do not find it easy to speak of how we do not live as your people, but you call us to share our weaknesses and failures with you, Inviting God. Tempted to think your salvation is for a select few, we put up barriers for others. Clinging to all you give to us, we are reluctant to share with those in need. Surrounded by evil and violence, we find it easier to close ranks with those just like us, rather than seeking peace and reconciliation for our world. Forgive us, God of our salvation. Open our hearts to our siblings all around us. Open our minds to the word of hope you speak to us. Open our spirits to the presence of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who flings wide the open doors of your kingdom, that all might find life with you.

Silent prayers of confession.

Assurance of Pardon

Receive the good news, my friends:

Christ came searching for us,

calling us by name,

leading us into God's kingdom.

In Christ, we become new people:

empty, we are made full;

lost, we are found;

dead in sin, we are made alive.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Adapted from Thom Shuman, posted on the Pilgrim WR Uniting Church website,

<https://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au/?p=2621>.

Benediction

Go now in the blessing and power of God who gives us life, that you may grow in faith and live as bearers of love and life everywhere you go. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, February 2025.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – *Set Your Mind*

August 3, 2025

[Colossians 3:1-11](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

This week marks the last “email” from Paul to the Colossians in this worship series, the last reminder about who the Christians of Colossae are and how their story forms their identity as a community. And, of course, how the Christians of Colossae might also inform who we are as the Christians of Little Rock, Buffalo, Athens, Wichita, Alamosa...I think you get the picture. The church in Colossae is part of our story, and we are part of theirs, even as we are all diverse Christian communities planted in places uniquely different yet somehow similar to Christian communities that sprouted and grew almost 2000 years ago.

Perhaps that’s because some aspects of humanity are so fundamental that no amount of time, technological advancement, linguistic evolution, or political upheaval can change them. Consider the importance of what we pay attention to. When I was a child, I saw a poster where someone took the popular aphorism “You are what you eat” and turned it into “You are what you read.” I think Paul would agree. What you read, what you listen to, what you set your mind to—all of it matters. It matters because what we give our attention to can either direct us toward Christ and living as Christ teaches...or not.

So, in worship this week, how do we lead the congregation to set their minds on things above? Begin by acknowledging everything that clamors for our attention. My meditation app reminds me that it’s okay if stray thoughts come into my mind; I need to acknowledge and then release anything that distracts me. There’s some wisdom there for worship planners and leaders, I think. It’s important that we acknowledge and even welcome what we are all bringing into the worship space when we gather. Focusing on the things of God does not mean ignoring and neglecting the things that make us weary, stressed, and anxious. We need to acknowledge what we carry and then turn to God, who holds our burdens with us and whose love is higher and greater than anything that tells us otherwise. Think of it like putting on a pair of glasses. Where the world presents us with all kinds of life and death, big deal kinds of stressors to prioritize, grace puts on glasses that help us keep everything else in perspective to God who loves us, cares for us, and guides us toward salvation and abundant life. This is what we worship planners are called to teach and practice and support in the midst of gathered worship.

During this series, we have offered a prompt each week to help your community write down and tell the story of your church, a place where they learn and practice how to set their minds on the things of God. Consider posting the prompt on your social media page(s) earlier in the week or presenting it after the sermon, giving everyone paper and a pen and holding space with quiet music while people write their responses. Invite congregants to keep the paper to themselves or to place it in the offering plate if they are willing to share it with the community. Gather any shared responses and find a way to share them with the church, either on social media, in a newsletter, or even incorporated into the sermon the following week.

For week 4, the writing prompt is: **How does worshiping in this community help you set your mind on things above?**

PREACHING NOTES

Woke up this mornin' with my mind, stayed on Jesus.

Woke up this mornin' with my mind, stayed on Jesus.

Woke up this mornin' with my mind, stayed on Jesus.

Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.

Woke Up this Mornin'
African-American Spiritual, Public Domain

The spiritual “Woke Up this Mornin’” is a paraphrase of Colossians 3:1-11. (And Romans 8:5. And Philippians 3:19. And 1 Chronicles 22:19, Ezekiel 40:4, and Romans 12:2, for that matter!) It is a common theme. Okay, not a paraphrase, but a reiteration of the invitation to keep one’s mind “stayed on Jesus.” Throughout the scriptures is the idea that our task as followers of Jesus is to set our minds to the task of following. It seems simple enough. Focus your mind; turn your thinking toward following, and then all kinds of goodness and growth will follow. The power of positive thinking, someone once said. “Think it, imagine it, and it is yours” was a popular mantra not too long ago. Easy peasy.

Well, simple, certainly. But easy? We live in a distracted and distractable world. There are voices aplenty, images that besiege us constantly, ideas that surround. Even those who haven’t been diagnosed with some form of attention deficit find it hard to stay on the task of keeping their minds stayed on Jesus. We hear so many messages attempting to tell us that this or that is the most important thing in our lives. If we do this thing, if we buy that stuff, if we live in this manner, if we look like that, then all will be well, we are told. Not just well, but extreme; our lives will be full of passion and power and fulfillment. Whew, it is exhausting, this mind-focusing thing.

The task, therefore, is one of swimming against the tide, or as Paul might say, changing orientation. “Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (*Col. 3:2 NRSV*). That’s helpful, isn’t it? But what does it mean? That we are supposed to go around with our heads in clouds, not paying attention to the world around us? That doesn’t seem effective, let alone safe. What’s that cliché? So heavenly minded as to be no earthly good— something like that. Is that what Paul is asking of us? That we set our minds in such a way that we are disconnected from life?

It might seem so. He goes on to tell us to put to death anything earthly. And then he gives us a list of the kinds of things he’s talking about. And we would have to agree that these things need to be done away with or turned away from. Put to death? Seems harsh. Necessary, perhaps, but harsh. And then there is a second list. But he isn’t quite as harsh with that one. “Get rid of,” he says, not put to death. And what are we getting rid of? “Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth (and your pen? Or keyboard?) and do not lie to one another...” (*Col 3:8-9 NRSV*).

So, we can certainly overanalyze, but it seems we’re asked to put to death those things that reside in us, the broken passions, lusts of various kinds. And we’re asked to get rid of ways of interacting with others, ways of talking to or about others. We are supposed to set our minds on things that are above, not things that match what we see around us all the time. We are to interact with even our enemies differently from what seems to be a matter of course around us today.

That’s what “setting your mind above” means, not that we are wrapped up in heaven, but that we live as though we were already there in how we treat one another, how we respond, how we build community,

and through acts of compassion and caring. When we set our minds on things that are above, we are more than useful; we are transforming the world in which we live. We are raising a standard of behavior and a respect for the human creation as a way of giving honor to God.

In the end, of course, this is beyond us. This focus, this setting of the mind, is more than we can handle on our own. Thankfully, there is nothing that we need to do on our own. Indeed, the glory of the discipleship path is that once we embark, we are never alone. Even in this task of setting one's mind, there is a helper. There is a presence that will invite and encourage and will direct our focus.

There is a version of the spiritual "Woke Up this Mornin'" that concludes with the verse that says

*Jesus, the captain in your mind, stayed on Jesus,
Jesus, the captain in your mind, stayed on Jesus,
Jesus, the captain in your mind, stayed on Jesus.
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.*

Jesus, the captain, is the one in and through the Spirit, who can help us in the ongoing task and joy of setting our minds on things that are above.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, we gather as people who have received new life in Jesus Christ.

We come to set our minds on Christ, who surrounds us in love.

The world tries to distract us with anxious rumors, worrisome lies, and misleading half-truths.

We come to set our minds on Christ, who surrounds us in love.

In this place, we gather to remind, remember, and renew our commitment to dwell in the love of Christ.

We come to set our minds on Christ, who surrounds us in love.

Children of God, come! Let us worship God, who clothes us in new life and renews us in grace.

Come, let us worship as we set our minds on Christ, who surrounds us in love.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, February 2025.

Prayer for the Day

God, our guide and our protector,
as we gather today in your holy house,
open our minds and souls and hearts,
that we may be inclined to hear the gentle direction

of your Spirit in our lives.

Help us follow you as you lead us

to the land you have created for us,

where we may dwell with you and in you. Amen.

Written by Robert Blezard on the Worship Elements page of the Ministry Matters website. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/10/opening-prayer-psalm-107.html>.

Prayer of Confession

God of glory,

you sent Jesus among us as the light of the world,

to reveal your love for all people.

We confess that our sin and pride hide the brightness of your light.

We turn away from the poor;

we ignore cries for justice;

we do not strive for peace.

Forgive us, God. In your mercy, cleanse us of our sin,

and renew us once again with your Spirit,

so that, as forgiven and renewed people,

we may reflect the love and life of Jesus Christ

into our world.

Assurance of Pardon

Our God is a God of grace and mercy and love;

know that our sins have been forgiven.

May we be strengthened in all goodness.

Since we have been raised with Christ,

let us seek the things that are above,

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

*Adapted from the **Presbyterian Church in Canada** website, <http://presbyterian.ca/worship/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/08/confession-light-of-world.html>.*

Benediction

Children of God, receive this blessing: may the renewing grace of the Triune God surround you; may the steadfast love of the Triune God uphold you, and may the goodness of the Triune God entice you to set your mind on Christ that you may live as God's image-bearers and gospel-bringers wherever you go. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, February 2025.