

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Summer is supposed to be a time of relaxation. At least that's what my memory tells us. You know those supposed lazy, hazy days of summer, the dog days when the temperature is so high that you don't want to do anything. I can remember as a kid, however long ago that was, that it seemed that July and August just took forever to get through. That's not the case anymore. Time has speeded up somehow. As example, this last week, my oldest son is in summer school and Marianne and our youngest son are down at Camp Nawakwa. And so the days of this week have been getting up, getting washed and getting dressed and getting Benjamin up, getting him dressed and fed and then we go to school. I come here I do the things that I need to do, answer my email, go through the net, find out the things that I need to do, make the telephone calls that I need do, whatever paper work or the weekly staff meeting or my weekly pastor's study group. Then I have to get up and leave to pick up Benjamin by noon, go over to the home of the high school kid whose helping to take care of Benjamin. Get them both back to our house, get Benjamin lunch, get back here to do the rest of the things that I need to do. The hospital visits, the home visits, whatever. Then I go home, get both Benjamin and Jessie. Drive them back to Jessie's house, then because I haven't been grocery shopping in two weeks and there are some very dicey things in the refrigerator right now. We take a swing through Weis and of course the last time we did that Weis didn't have anything that we wanted, so we ended up with mac and cheese with fruit for dessert. Then come home, it's late at night and so we finally get to bed, or the one night this week that we did get down to camp then I had to be on the road by seven o'clock in the morning to get back up here in time to get all of this other stuff done. Now I realize that there are people in this world, there are people in this congregation who have a far more difficult life then I do. They have to work longer or harder with less pay or no benefits. I have a roof over my head, I have a bed to sleep, in I have food on the table, or I at least have it available through Arby's Drive-thru. I have money for my bills, but in all of that did you notice what was missing? It was the spending the time with God.

In the letter to the church at Colossae that Paul wrote as Bill read it to us this evening. In the opening verses there, Paul talks about many things. And in the weeks to come, I will probably talk about many of those things as well. But in this opening that we heard tonight, Paul does this wonderful thing to those who are hearing the letter, both for the first time and for us tonight. Paul takes his time. He introduces himself and Timothy to a congregation that they have never met. And he encourages those who are hearing this letter in reminding them that they themselves, the hearers, are the faithful in Christ at Colossae. The faithful in Christ in Camp Hill. And then in the original Greek it's two very long sentences. Then he makes three basic points. All of which revolve around rest, taking time, and remembering God.

Verse 1, he talks about the saints and faithful brothers and sisters who are in Christ. Paul knows that it's always helpful to remember who we are. When we're arguing with our spouse when we're sitting in rush hour traffic, when we're coping with the complexities of our job. It's easy to forget who we are, but at our very core, we are saints. We are set apart, called to be true to our position in Christ. And then for us who are the saints and who are faithful, Paul extends

grace and peace. What a wonderful thing to ask of God, grace and peace from God our Father.

The next point, Paul goes on to discuss not just who we are, but what we have. Faith, hope, and love. Now that might sound a little familiar to you. He did the same thing back in one of the letters to the Corinthians in Chapter 13. Paul notes that these Christians in Colossae have faith in Christ. And he uses faith both as a noun and a verb. They have *the* faith that is they're committed to the faith as a body. They are committed to the faith that is the truth in flesh in Jesus Christ. And if they exercise that faith, if they trust, if they believe that Jesus is the one who alone is trustworthy and faithful, then they surrender control. We surrender control. Which is like falling back into our favorite overstuffed chair or a bed at the end of the day, or the hammock out back. When we can surrender control to God, it goes a long way on the road to being at our hearts, peace filled, grace filled and stressless.

Now Paul goes on to remind the church and us as well that we have hope. That is, we're not living for this world, but for the world that is to come. For as believers we have a different mind set from those who live day to day for themselves for just the possessions that they want. We as believers, we are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. And so, our behavior, angered in hope is reflected in God's grace. Now their love, Paul notes, is well known in the region. It's a love they have for all of the saints. It's a love that comes to them from the spirit. It comes from God and it is a sign that God is at work among them.

Having made these points of God's grace and peace and that God is there with them, Paul goes on to say that God wants to share with us, who are the saints, who are the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, that we might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Have a knowledge that the will of God that in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, well that's opposed to the wisdom and understanding of the world. That we might have wisdom in order to lead lives that are worthy of God. To live a life pleasing to God, to bear fruit in all that we do. That we might be made strong with the strength that comes from God.

In other words, Paul prays for the church that they might have knowledge, wisdom, be right living, do good works, have strength, have endurance and patience. Give Thanksgiving, be filled with enlightenment and walk in God's forgiveness. Now all of those work together to bring about rest and strength and renew our spirit. So that as we are constantly bombarded by the things of the world, by forces that conspire to tempt us and load us up with stress, that these things work together. To remind us of whose we are and for whom we live.

Now maybe we're saying to ourselves, well that was easy for Paul to say 2000 years ago. He didn't have a beeper on his belt, he didn't have his cell phone going off every fifteen minutes, he didn't have his alarm clock ringing constantly or his little personal PDA, person digital assistant going off telling him of all the meetings that he had to go. Elijah, a prophet from the Old Testament, fled from Queen Jezebel and the Prophets of Baal because he was afraid that they were going to kill him. He went off into the desert and even in the desert he wasn't at peace. He remained afraid. Augustine, one of our great theologians, who lived from 354 - 430 fled from North Africa, from the city of Carthage in North Africa to which was a city that he called a "boiling cauldron of lust," makes you wonder what was going on there. He ran away to Rome, but he was as equally uncomfortable in Rome as he had been in Carthage. Jerome, who translated the New Testament from Greek into Latin, fled from Rome out into the desert so that he could be free of the temptation of dancing girls. We're not exactly sure of what he meant by dancing girls, but he wanted to be free from them. He went out in the desert and still in the

desert he continued to be tempted even out in the desert.

We do live in a warped speed culture where the foot of the oppressor is too often and too quickly lodged against the neck of the oppressed. We live in a litigious culture in which people are loathed to accept responsibility for their own actions. Where commitments have no more staying power than a Brittany Spears mirage. We try to function in a hyper reality in which we're opening at twitch speed with our eyes and we don't know how to slow down. We go thru cycles of compassion fatigue, we fight for instant upgrades amid a media centric matrix of moral deregulation, politicians who are hyperventilating, globalization, loss of jobs, wardrobe malfunctions. And in the end we feel as though all we're doing is rearranging the chairs on the desk of the Titanic. Is it any wonder that often times we feel that we just want to chuck it all and crawl off somewhere to be alone.

Paul's words to the Colossians. Paul's words to us today, help us to refocus on what is ultimate in our lives, grace and peace. So let us take the time honestly to relax. Let us take the time to honestly sit and talk with God that we might work toward a rest filled life and stress less living. Let us reorder our own sense of whom we are and so that as we live in the light of the one who has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the beloved Son and whom we have redemption we might indeed be renewed, relaxed, and go forth in God's love to share that grace and peace to all whom we encounter.

Amen.