

The Church in the Valley: *It's Like Planting a Seed*
a message based on
Colossians 1:1-14

Followers of Jesus:

Before we read these verses this morning, I want to introduce you to this church in the valley called Colosse. In the book of Acts the area around Colosse is called “*Phrygia*,” (Acts 2:10) which is a part of what was then called the province of Asia (Acts 19:10), today called Turkey. The city itself was one of three in the Lycus Valley. Two of those cities were on the South side of the River Lycus, one was on the North side of said river.

Colosse was located at a place in the River Lycus which today may well be enjoyed by kayakers who love the challenge of continual rapids. Just beyond the city there was a deep gorge that went on for about five kilometres until it met up with another river, the Meander. About 16 kilometres from Colosse was another city familiar to us because of the last book of the Bible, Laodicea – you know, the church that was neither hot nor cold! On the other side of the River Lycus, standing about 100 metres above Laodicea, was the third city, called Hierapolis (which means, “holy city”). All of these cities are mentioned in this letter.

Colosse (1:2)

Laodicea (2:1; 4:13, 15-16)

Hierapolis (4:13)

How did the gospel get to Colosse? It was planted by a man whom Paul calls here “*our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf*” (1:7), and later in the letter, “*one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus*” (4:12). Epaphras had recently paid Paul a visit while Paul was in prison, and given a report on the church started there. “*I vouch for him,*” Paul writes in chapter 4, “*that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis*” (4:13). So not only did Epaphras plant the church in Colosse, but also in those other two cities as well.

Here's how it may have happened. While Paul was in Ephesus he preached the gospel. Epaphras, who was likely visiting that city which was about 160 kilometres from Colosse, heard the good news and believed it. He then went to back Colosse (where he was from), and to the other cities to start churches there.

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Followers of Jesus:

I wonder, this morning, who here knows what I'm talking about when I say the words: "Zoom, Zoom, Zoom!" Who knows that that slogan is used by Mazda to sell their vehicles? Some of us may have heard the sound, but aren't certain about the produce behind them. We live, don't we, in the information age, a time in history when there's lots of information readily available to us. Want to know more? On April 24, 2007 Sujana Patel wrote an article she called, "301 Useless Facts" on line, to which there were 934 comments made. Did you know that Samuel Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain) predicted while he lived that he would die on the day Halley's Comet could be seen? It just so happens that he was also born on the day said comet was seen. Did you know that the dot over the letter "i" is called a tittle? And did you know that a raisin dropped into a glass of champagne will bounce up and down continuously from the bottom to the top of the glass? These are just some of the things we can know today!

Paul and Timothy have been talking together with fellow church planter, Epaphras, and for the most part are very pleased with what they hear about the church. There is something, though, that is bothering them greatly about what's been going on there. People have been going around teaching the church there that what was needed in addition to what they heard before, was some sort of secret knowledge. Some claimed they knew, more than anyone else, something that was important for life and godliness. This is why the letter was written.

So there's this church in the valley by a river, which feeds into another river; a beautiful place! Paul and Timothy have become aware of this church through their friend and fellow church-planter, Epaphras. He's told them some good things about the church, and ever since then their first reaction was to bring God's attention to that church. The first thing they do is thank God for that church. Take note, please, of the way thankfulness keeps coming through here.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you (Col 1:3).

... joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Col 1:11-12).

Why are they so thankful for this church in the valley? These men know a thing or two about churches. They knew what it takes to start a church; or, to put it in more biblical terms, they knew what it takes to "plant" a church. How do you go about planting a church? There are certain sorts of seeds needed, certain essentials

that are crucial to a good plant. Farmers know all about that. I watched from afar, in late Spring this year, the farmers first preparing the fields just over here on the corner of Lakes and Trunk; you know, the Vanboven farm. After preparation, the seeding; after seeding, the watering: a certain amount of expertise was needed to grow the crop. Paul writes in another place:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds (1 Cor 3:10).

Paul knows the sorts of seeds that need to be planted for a church to take root and grow. He makes quick mention of them here. The first thing that is needed is faith:

... we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus (1:4).

You can't have a church without faith in Christ Jesus. You can't have a church without looking back at the significant sacrifice of Jesus Christ crucified, raised, and ascended. Faith is something that is meant to grow and flourish. Faith is so important that God never leaves it be to see what'll happen next.

... being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience... (1:11).

Our faith needs to be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might. Why? So that we'll keep moving forward in our faith, and persevere. This is the hard work of faith, when life isn't easy, when God gets hard to understand. So there is thanks given to God for faith in Christ Jesus, faith that keeps growing. Is your faith growing?

Combined with looking back at what Jesus has done, the church also looks to present reality. The present is always important. In what way? In the way we interact with one another. Sometimes we say to another, "Now, be nice!" as though being nice is the highest value we could have. Is that so? Combined with faith this other seed is an almost automatic response.

... and of the love you have for all the saints (1:4).

This is part of the fruit that comes out of faith. The Colossians were learning love well. The report was so.

(Ephaphras) told us of your love in the Spirit (1:8).

What kind of love is this? It is an almost automatic response to faith, but it is not natural. It comes to us as we open ourselves up to the work of the Holy Spirit. In one of the first letters Paul wrote, he tells of this love.

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other (1 Thess 4:9).

There it is. It's ours for the asking! It's not easy to come into this kind of love. That's why we must always move from the present into the past, and cry out to Jesus again and again: "Lord, save me again! Help me love my spouse; my children; my teenager; my fellow church member! I can't, but you can, through me!"

The third seed that is needed is the one that looks to the future. We look to the past by putting our faith in what Christ did on the cross. We look to the present, for the kind of love that comes from the Spirit. We look to the future, and the future is all about hope.

... from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven... (1:5).

What is stored up in heaven for us? It's who is stored: it's Jesus, ascended who is our hope. The hope is expressed for us in an exciting way here.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (1:13).

The church in the valley has hope, because Jesus was able to overcome all the power of the evil one. One time, when Jesus had sent out the 72 on a mission, they returned to him, giving a report that "even the demons were subject to us in your name" (Luke 10:18).

Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:18-19).

Jeremias comments: "Jesus' visionary cry of joy leaps over the interval of time before the final crisis, and sees in the exorcisms performed by the disciples the dawn of the annihilation of Satan." If Satan is defeated to such utter ruin, do you think the church in the valley has hope for the future?

Can we see why Paul, and Timothy, and Epaphras take time to bring this church in the valley to God's attention, first by thanking God for this church? All of these ingredients – every one – are a gift from God. Faith, love, hope: the three that remain according to 1 Corinthians 13:13, the three that we will always have as church,

these three are all gifts from God. Through Jesus Christ our past is taken care of; our present is being cared for; and our future is secure.

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 (1:5).

The verses we read this morning are part of typical prayer report given by Paul and Timothy. David Watson once wrote: "Prayer means saying, 'Yes' to God, submitting our lives to his will, bowing to his sovereignty, discovering and enjoying his Father-love." Have you ever noticed how young people use the word, "Yes!" If you give permission to do some fun thing, they say, "Yes!" If there is something they really agree with, they say, "Yes!" Prayer is saying, "Yes!" to God, to desiring to fully know his will. That is what we need to know; that is all we need to know.

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Lord's Supper celebration

We read it just a few moments ago from Colossians 1: *joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

As we come to the table this morning, we can come joyfully giving thanks. This is what the exiles of Judah did when they returned home from Babylon. Isaiah predicted it. "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. The psalm writer in Psalm 126:2-3 experienced it: *Our mouths are filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

There's a reason why we can come with joy to the table this morning. God has qualified each one of us to come: men, women, girls and boys can all take and eat, and take and drink. We can come just as we: no matter what we've done, or haven't done, no matter what we've thought, no matter. See, it's not what we have done at all. It's what Jesus has done for us. And what has he done? He died on the cross to save us from our sins! Let's sing about that together right now.