Meeting Jesus: Walk and Word

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0:00] Father, speak to us that we may speak in loving echoes of your tones and wing your words that they may reach the hidden depths of every heart which is your home.

In Christ's name we pray, amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, before the season of Lent began, we started a sermon series called Meet Jesus.
That sermon series was taken from a number of the narratives in one of two of the four gospels beginning the New Testament. And we're going to leave the gospel narratives this morning and go to one of Paul's letters.
Though it would have been interesting to actually preach a sermon on the gospel text this morning known as the temptation of Jesus. It must have been pretty interesting for the devil to meet Jesus. If I were preaching on that, I would have called the sermon title, Don't Cross Me. But that's not the sermon title this morning.
[1:15] It's something about the word and walking. And so we're going to look at meeting Jesus through Colossians.

What Paul has to say about what it's like for us to be people, to share Jesus with others, having met him. Not only meeting Jesus, but also knowing him.
It's hard to introduce anyone to Jesus if you don't know him personally. If you've ever had to introduce someone that you don't really know before, you know what a difference it makes actually when you don't compared to actually when you do know someone quite well and then introduce them to a friend or even strangers for that matter.
But this raises the question, though, I think that we need to address before we look at the text today, which you'll find on page 985 of your Bible. And that is, according to Paul, in the letter of Colossians, who is Jesus?
Well, the great work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is pictured in many ways throughout the Bible. The past year with the five solas of the Reformation and last week, Article 11 that I read to you, we learn that God's great work is that of justification.
[2:30] And it's not the only word used to describe the work of the Trinity to address our condition of sin. Other terms are used to describe that work of our Lord that include salvation and redemption, regeneration and sanctification.

But in this letter of Paul's, the operative word is reconciliation. Now, Paul uses the word redemption once, but reconciliation for the most part is unique to this letter of Paul's compared to his others. And the gospel of which Paul speaks in today's text is the message of reconciliation that Paul wants to share while he is in and if he is released from prison.
This reconciliation, which is the restoration of relationships of two parties that have been separated from one another. And in the case between God and creation, his creatures, we are hostile towards God, resulting in alienation from him.
God is not hostile towards us, and he isn't alienated from him, but we alienate ourselves from him through hostilization.
[3:42] So only God then can take the initiative to reconcile us who are alienated from him to him. Nothing that we can do can reconcile ourselves to God.

Try as we might, nothing that we can do can do that. It is only by God's sheer grace and mercy that he reconciles us to him.
So in chapter one of this letter, Paul presents the supremacy and the preeminence of Christ. He goes on to say this, that the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood through the cross.

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That's what reconciliation is. That's God's great work in Colossians through Jesus Christ for our sake. That's essentially the gospel according to Paul in this letter.
And now when we come to the end of the letter, chapter four, Paul issues two commands, two exhortations to the church. Paul's letters often take this pattern. He'll start with doctrine and then he'll end with duty, or he'll start with belief and then describe, flesh out behavior.
[4:59] And Paul encourages two things at the end. The first one is prayer, and the second one is to walk. You can tell that you've done the second one. You've made it here this morning.

Hopefully you've done the first as well. So, Paul ends his letter in much the same way that he begins. The letter opens with the subject of prayer, and it also closes with the subject of prayer. Paul is laser focused on getting the word out about Jesus. But proclaiming the gospel message isn't the first priority of the Christian or the church.
A few weeks ago, I shared a quote with you from John Webster. Webster asserted that the primary work of the church is to listen to the word of God. And our second priority then is to proclaim that word in the church and the world.
But an absolutely critical step in between those two is actually to pray. The church must always pray before, during, and after anything that we say and do.
[6:02] And what do we pray, or what does Paul actually think about prayer then? These two things about prayer. The one is opening, an open door, and the other one is actually clarity. Now, we live in a world that claims openness.

And while the church is accused of being closed-minded, and sometimes it acts like an exclusive club, the world is also very closed-minded. It too can act like an exclusive club of all kinds of associations.
Paul is in prison, and many doors are closed to and upon him. Yet, he wants not an open cell to move freely.
Paul wants an open door for the word of God. And this word of God, this word that Paul uses here, is what is known as the logos, or ultimate reality.
That which is supremely significant. And Paul is referring to the gospel here, as he did back in chapter 1, verse 5, when he writes, of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel.
[7:14] Paul knows the resistance, the hostility, and the alienation in the world towards God's gospel. There is no sense in trying to communicate it by our will, confidence, even compassion, and strategies.

The effectiveness and fruitful proclamation of the gospel demands prayer. Prayer that God would send his Holy Spirit, open doors so hearts and minds would be open to his word.
That's the first thing about this prayer that he exhorts us to. But that's not all, though. The apostle continues with this, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.
It seems self-evident in that communication of the word must not be confusing. In other words, the proclamation must be plain about the main message of the gospel.
Now, adding to or subtracting from the message of reconciliation by God through Christ. It's so easy to get sidetracked in our Christian discipleship and proclamation.
[8:29] And that's why Paul affirms that the church at the beginning of the letter, he says this about them. He affirms their faith and their love and their hope. This faith in Christ alone.

This love of the saints, which is how the world actually knows that we are Jesus' disciples. And this hope that's laid up in heaven. Paul is saying there needs to be absolute clarity about this.
And the Christian life is dynamic enough to meet the complexities of our day. But it's also simple enough to anyone who trusts in Jesus in order to live it out.
Simple, that is, if we admit our alienation from God. An alienation that we cannot overcome. We are completely at the grace and mercy of God to reconcile us to him.
So Paul exhorts this. Let's be clear about the gospel. It's not all about prayer, though. Paul follows up his exhortation to pray with these words.
[9:32] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. We've heard a lot about wisdom through our sermon series on Proverbs recently.

And we know that relationships, friendships, require not only love for the saints and others, but a lot of wisdom. However, sometimes we use prayer as an excuse for inaction or silence.
C.S. Lewis once wrote, It's much easier to pray for a boar than to go and visit him. The same could also be said about speaking to a neighbor or about the gospel.

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At some point, given that the gospel equals the word of truth, there comes a time to speak. And there are two key elements with respect to walking toward or living out this gospel among others. And the first, Paul says, is salt. And the second one is giving answers. So succinctly then, Paul urges Christians, Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.
[10:41] In other words, speak in such a way as to not only season the relationship, but preserve the relationship. Christians can speak and share the gospel in a way that alienates others.

The gospel is an offense to many, but it doesn't give us permission to be offensive. In fact, Paul suggests at other times that we are to give a defense for the gospel.
That's the first thing. Salt our relationships. Season them. Preserve them. And then secondly, answer. Paul gives an explanation to the Christians for showing grace.
He says, So that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Now, there's an implication in this exhortation. That we know how to give an answer implies that outsiders are actually asking us questions.
Christians sometimes give answers that were not even asked. How is it that a follower of Christ is asked question by others then?
[11:48] Let me suggest, if you want to give an answer, start by asking questions. I don't know anyone who would show interest in me or even what I think if I don't actually show interest in what others think.

And so when I ask questions, then I can expect a question and be ready to give an answer. So think about this. What was the way that you met Jesus?
I bet that someone prayed for you. And maybe even the person spoke the gospel to you who was praying for you as well. I'm sure that wasn't all, though.
I'll bet that someone walked and lived out the gospel with a great deal of charity and clarity in your life. In the morning and evening prayer, there's a petition that's called the general thanksgiving. And in that prayer, we hear these words. I think this is a great petition for our prayer and walking out this life.
[13:09] May this be our prayer and the promise and the promise and the proclamation that we offer others in this world in which we live.

I speak to you in the name of the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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