Potions: An Undivided Plate Memory Verse: Colossians 1:19

January 15th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

**SLIDE 1 - TITLE**

 I don’t know about you, but when I comes to eating out, I am partial to buffets. There are a few reasons to prefer a buffet: First of all, there is no waiting. You walk right in, there is not waiting for a check, you pay right away. There is usually no waiting for a table, you simply find one that is open and claim it as your own. There is no waiting for a waiter…you immediately stroll over to he food and take your pick. That leads to the next point of a buffet’s superiority: there is no menu. Why would I want to read about the food that I will eventually have when instead, I could see and smell the food that is right there at my fingertips? Not only that, but a buffet allows me to take a taste of something new. If I am not sure about a certain dish, instead of ordering a whole entrée, I can simply take a small sample and try it out. Buffet work well for our family. NO matter where we go, we will be paying a hefty bill, but a least with a buffet, we can placate even the pickiest of pallets and when all else fails; there is jello. Not to mention, there is usually some form of soft serve ice cream available for dessert. Buffets are convenient, they are experiential but best of all, they offer the maximum amount of choice for any customer.

 Indeed, a buffet is only as good as the options it offers. Of course, customers want quality food that tastes good and does not make them sick, but even a high quality buffet will suffer critique if it does not have a vast enough array of selections. The value of a buffet lies in its variety. So before you get too hungry or start wondering if I have taken on a partnership with some local establishments, let’s turn to scripture. But as we do, keep in mind this illustration of a buffet line. Turn with me to Colossians.

**SLIDE 2: LIST**

 Colossians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. It is one of his prison epistles, meaning he wrote it while under detainment in Rome. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul. Colossae would be sort of a second generation church. Meaning while Paul was preaching in Ephesus, which in on the coast, a man named Epaphras heard the gospel and was saved in Jesus. He took that gospel back to his home, Colossae and before long, there was a full-fledged community of Christians who met together for teaching and worship and fellowship…a church! The church had run into some tough questions and needed some guidance, so founding pastor Epaphras goes to visit Paul in prison to get some advice. The letter we have today was part of Paul’s response. Colossae was a relatively unimportant city. It existed in the shadow of nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. But Paul understands this church to be a valid recipient of the Holy Spirit. Paul recognizes that, even though he never been there, God is at work in Colossae. And so he provides a pastoral response to the problems Epaphras has described. What are those problems? Well, we will uncover some of that as we go, but suffice it to say that there is nothing new under the sun. Many of the issues the Colossian Christians faced are the same ones we still deal with today.

**SLIDE 3 and 4: Chapter 1 1:8 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will, and Timothy our brother. To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae.Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. We’ve done this since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all God’s people. You have this faith and love because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You previously heard about this hope through the true message, the good news, which has come to you. This message has been bearing fruit and growing among you since the day you heard and truly understood God’s grace, in the same way that it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world. You learned it from Epaphras, who is the fellow slave we love and Christ’s faithful minister for your sake. He informed us of your love in the Spirit.**

So let us begin in chapter 1. We will see Paul’s heart for this church as well as his pride in the work that Epaphras is doing, but all of it is couched in giving credit to God alone: READ 1-8. So Paul has established his connection to this church and as an authoritative voice of leadership, he turns to the topic of maturity. And this idea of maturity we will see throughout the entirety of this letter.

**SLIDE 5:Colossian 1:9**

Paul goes on: Verse 9. That phrase “filled with the knowledge of God’s will” is a hefty one. It certainly serves to describe someone who is mature, but it also mentions knowledge… Information… understanding. So Paul is pairing the two concepts. A mature person is a knowledgeable person, but not in just any subject, he is specifically referring to God’s will. This is a good spot to comment on the spiritual climate of a place like Colossae. For the most part, people lived in fear of the gods. They did not know what to expect from the universe or what happens after death. They would rely on amulets and magical trinkets to somehow find protection from a dreadful fate. This even led to self-inflicted harm which stemmed from a Gnostic worldview. Gnosticism was a pattern of thinking that taught that the physical realm was evil and needed to be done away with, while the spiritual was good. But the spiritual world was obviously mysterious and knowledge about it was hidden. So teachers would come along spouting that they had attained some sort of knowledge about the spiritual world and they would prescribe methods of curbing the physical (i.e. self-harm) and embracing the spiritual. Paul is privy to all this background noise, and he has something to say about it, hence he continually speaks about knowledge. Verse 10 he says “So we are praying this (that is, for their fullness in God’s will) READ verse 10-14.

**SLIDE 6: Colossians 1:10-14 We’re praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; by being strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; and by giving thanks with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God’s holy people. He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.**

So instead of dreading what the gods might do, Paul shares his knowledge, that God is offering a royal inheritance, that we are to live in light and not darkness, that through Jesus our sins have been forgiven.

Now we get to an ancient hymn. We don’t know where it came from, we don’t know how well known it was, but Paul basically bursts into song as he extols the supremacy of Christ. And if you appreciate truth, this is one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture. If you even wonder about what is worth memorizing and sticking directly into the depths of your brain, this is it. It goes like this: READ 15-20.

**SLIDE 7: Colossians 1:15-20 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation, Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the one who is firstborn from among the dead so that he might occupy the first place in everything. Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him— whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross.**

This is living water right here. Isn’t that refreshing? Doesn’t that put everything into perspective? Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. The mystery is being unveiled in him! He is the Creator of all things, he holds all things together, and by his blood we can have peace with God. Peace was an elusive commodity in the ancient world, and make no mistake, outside of Christ, we are no closer to it today. Paul extrapolates on our new found peace with God. READ 21-23.

**SLIDE 9: Colossians 1:21-23 Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your minds, which was shown by your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people who are holy, faultless, and without blame. But you need to remain well established and rooted in faith and not shift away from the hope given in the good news that you heard. This message has been preached throughout all creation under heaven. And I, Paul, became a servant of this good news.**

 Again, maturity in knowledge here. “Don’t pivot,” he says, “From the good news that you were taught. That’s the knowledge that you need…not all this secret stuff that denigrates the physical realm.” In fact, look at 22….Paul specifically states that we are reconciled to God through Jesus, how so? Through his physical body! The body is good…it too has been redeemed by Christ. He is the Creator of all that we see after all…how can we then come along and proclaim it to be bad?

 We are going to stop there for today. But I want to take some time and help us see how all this fits in with where we are today. If we were to pick a few concepts out of Paul’s letter so far we would go with the ones that I have already mentioned: knowledge and maturity. But his whole discussion is rooted in the supremacy of Christ.

 With Gnosticism making it’s rounds and mysterious spiritual knowledge being the currency of religious discussion, the Colossians were stuck in the middle of a syncretic world. That is, they lived in a blender of religious ideas. Some local traditions, some Jewish teachings, some Gnostic advice, some ancient superstitions and a now some ideas about Jesus of Nazareth have been thrown into the mix. Sure, why not? Just like a buffet line, the more options the better. Then we can take a little of this and a little of that, and try some of this and make sure to avoid that. And just like the Colossians, we come to the same buffet of religious thought with every option imaginable available to us. We are free to start with some Jesus…he represents the love of God and he tastes pretty sweet, but we will make sure to pick around and pull out some of the bitter bites from the Old Testament. What might complement better is a side of karma and some of the reincarnation stuff. Some humanism should be included, everyone else seems to love it, and what about the salad bar…some environmentalism greenery is a healthy choice. And I noticed they had soft serve tolerance with open-minded sprinkles on top.

 It’s all there, all piping hot and ready for the taking.

 We stand before this buffet, our plate in hand, wondering how we can possibly taste it all. We even strategize a bit as we consider how high and wide we can stack everything without spilling. Or you will see those poor souls, like Pastor Cassi, who cannot bear to let one item touch another and so we approach this buffet hoping against hope that they have lunch trays with dividers. But it is inevitable…once we fill our plates, it all gets mixed together until it becomes very difficult to separate one entrée from another; one idea from another.

**SLIDE 10: Church, this is our reality.**

 Church, this is our reality. Pluralism…syncretism…blending…mixing…confusion. People live in this confusion. But as Paul says, Jesus came to bring light, to do away with confusion. So here is the solution that Paul offers to us in the first part of his letter here: when it comes to the buffet of innumerable options, fill up on Jesus. Come to him with an undivided plate, pile it high with Christ and nothing else. Christ is the only portion we need.

 Verse 19: “All the fullness of God was pleased to live in him.” That’s why we come to a buffet in the first place right? We are hungry…we are looking to be filled, but who here is going to argue that a buffet is a healthy option? In fact, every buffet comes with a sort of implied challenge: can you eat more food than you paid for? If I go into a buffet that is a little pricier, well then, I guess I’ll just have to eat more. And that doesn’t mean that I will be taking seconds on the salad bar. No, I am going chow down on my favorites and even if the items themselves are not too bad for me, the sheer amount of food I end up consuming becomes unhealthy. God knows we are hungry, and he wants to fill us and Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was along the very some line. Verse 9 again. His prayer is that their church be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, and since Christ is the fullness of God, we come to him and him alone. He is our portion.

**SLIDE 11: Christ is the fullness of God, we come to him and him alone. He is our portion.**

 What have you been eating? What has filled your plate, or in this case, your heart? Is your heart divided? Is it segmented out provide room for a little of this and a little of that? Do you feel hungry? Let Christ fill you full. Let the tempting smells and sizzling of the other offerings fade. Don’t shift away from the hope of the good news. There is nothing else on the buffet worthy of the precious little space we have on our plates or in our hearts. Nothing else is worthy! I want to challenge you this week to take this Christ hymn passage, verse 15-20 and feast on it. Now we know what a feast is…it is large meal usually served in conjunction with a celebration. A feast is “a plentiful supply of something enjoyable.” So when I say to feast on this Christ hymn passage, I mean to read through it prayerfully; slowly. Savor the truth that it declares. Enjoy the effects of that truth in your own life. Smile when it tastes good, and then go back for more. Read it again and again. As you read it over, celebrate the God who has revealed himself in such a way. AS you do so, as you feast, you will actually find that your are ingesting the Word of God. It’s truth is becoming a part of you and, like a healthy meal, it’s effect will be to strengthen, sustain and fill you full.

 Will you do that this week? Will you find some time to sit down to a meal of these five verses and just feast upon them? Enjoy them?

 May our appetites have eyes for nothing else. My our hearts be undivided, may we find our fill in Christ and in Christ alone.