

**BEING WITH THE SAINTS IN LIGHT
FINDING STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY**

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. ...Colossians 1:11

This week involved a switch back to standard time. So the questions came. “What are you going to do with that extra hour?” “What did you do?” If you answered “Sleep” you became part of the overwhelming response. The unhesitating answer “sleep” speaks to our collective condition – exhaustion. It’s hard living in this northern climate of the seasons shifting, but expectations do not. Lights go on to extend our work day past our biological limits. The low level lighting of the television, the computer, the alarm clock and the cell phone etc. ensure that we keep on going, even in the dark. Those suffering most are the shift workers. Examples of those suffering even more were the miners who were trapped in darkness of 69 days. One doctor on the scene of another miner disaster said “The men’s worst enemy had been the darkness”. We don’t adapt well to the darkness. It affects our bodies as it affects our minds.

Yet there is something much worse than the physical darkness. There is the spiritual darkness from a prince whose utter iron-clad grip we are freed from in baptism. Yet we struggle continually. The Christians in Colossae most certainly struggled. They struggled with fatigue in living the Christian life.

Paul was praying from Rome while under house arrest because he knows how easy it is to become weary. “The poor will be with you always” said Jesus. And indeed they are. We feel like the child trying to drain an ocean carrying his pail holding a shovel. One is feed and it seems two more of the hungry take his place. We see this also in the spiritual realm. One is brought to faith, baptism, even to the Table of the Lord’s Supper. But it always seems two more have fallen away. We who labour can so easily get discouraged. We try to work harder and maybe even smarter. My voice now carries the Gospel past the finite walls of this church to the world over the internet. Still, hells jaws open, and many more souls feed the insatiable appetite for more. The struggle continues without even the night coming to give us rest. We feel weary and want to give up but there is hope.

We are like infantry soldiers fighting on a plain in the thick of the battle. We cannot tell if we’re winning or losing. But the omniscient eyes on the hillside, who can survey the whole battle, know. The Captain of our Salvation who is both with us in the thick of it yet divine can see it all from the perspective of eternity, the one who is Christ tells us that we are indeed winning. We ought not to lose heart.

So Paul’s prayer for the saints in Colossae is an appropriate prayer for us and Christians in every land and time. **“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy”** Colossians 1:11. In His glorious divine might our Lord can share his perspective.

In the prayer he incites us to return to the source of our strength. It is the strength of the Lord! His is a “glorious might”. It is a might that is most firmly demonstrated in the fact that he has “qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light”.

He has worked in us salvation. He has “qualified us”. He has worked within us faith. It’s not cheap. It was not easy. It was not fast.

To qualify us was not a quick process. It was a salvation worked for us “from the foundations of the world” (Revelation 13:6). From the distant past whose number of years, despite human attempts, remain incalculable - God the Father was fashioning his plan. It was not fast, but a lengthy plan requiring perseverance and the struggle of the Almighty.

Think about this: before the universe was created, before time existed, before man was created, God knew that we (in Adam) would sin. He knew we would rebel against our Creator. And in the wisdom and love of God, in eternity, He predetermined a plan so that we could receive a free gift of salvation. In eternity, God planned for the Son of God to step into history to provide the ultimate sacrifice—the sinless Son of God would suffer sin’s penalty of death, be raised from the dead, thus providing a way of salvation.

It was not easy. God called his armies of angels and archangels from heavenly realms to struggle against our adversary and accuser who is Lucifer. Revelation 12:7-9 is one of those passages where a picture of the remote past is blended with what shall be in the future. The fall of Satan from heaven which Jesus saw, is an event in the past yet still in the future (Luke 10).

⁷Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹And the great dragon was thrown down - that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹²Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Into the fray steps the Lamb of God. He steps onto the field and offers his precious blood. It is the precious blood also mentioned by Paul to the Colossians. There is the anticipation of the cross, the embracing and carrying of the cross, and then the crucifixion on the cross. There was the watching of his mother at the foot of the cross. It was not easy.

It was not cheap. Human life around the world is sold quite cheap. Slavery still exists. It exists under many different names. Lives lost are still compensated in dollars for the right law suit. Jesus was also betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. Yet we know his true value. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians in the verses following our text today goes into detail concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Indeed he is special. And special is valuable.

In the verses just following our epistle reading Paul describes how Jesus is special. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over all creation. Yet he is the one through all things were created both visible and invisible. Yes, he created all the angels which Paul describes here by their rank, thrones, dominions, O principalities and powers. He is the head of the church. He is the firstborn of the dead.

There is nothing more special than that! Adam and we also, being in Adam, lost the image of God. But Christ as the second Adam regained the image for us by living a perfect life. He is the firstborn, not first in the sense of chronology, for Paul tells us that Jesus existed from eternity but rather Christ is first in the sense of rank,

power and glory. He is above all angels as “The Angel of the Lord (capitalized)”. He is the head of the church and most importantly “the firstborn of the dead”.

Now Paul was reminding the Colossians of all these things so that they might have strength and hope. Because as weary people they were under temptation to follow teachers who promised experiences that would invigorate their souls. They were people known as Gnostics. Interestingly they still exist today. We have a Gnostic Centre in Toronto near Danforth and Pape Ave. They are saying the same things that the Gnostics of old had said. Go on out of body experiences. Venture forth on the astral plane. Speak to angels. Find meaning in your dreams. Be awake in your dreams. Really live! This is the promise. But I assure you it is empty.

I looked at their web site. They are predominately young single people in their twenties. They want to find something fulfilling and are suffering the disappointment of leaving school and entering the work force which isn't what they expected: long commutes, demanding employers, few opportunities for advancement. They are exhausted and want some experience to energize themselves.

But is the experience real? It is as fleeting as emotion. Where are the elderly in this group who can testify of its lasting permanence? I didn't see one elderly proponent of this New Age Gnostic faith. However, Christianity offers something real and enduring. Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died and was raised from the dead. In this is a demonstration of real love. It's more than a feeling. They can have their experiences but we have our reality. Life, even the Christian life can become wearisome. Even our Lord tired in this body and needed to flee in search of rest. But there is a hope that sustains. Christ has risen from the dead. No one can take that away from us. And so we share the attitude of St. Paul.

These momentary troubles are but nothing compared to the surpassing riches which await us in Christ Jesus. We have eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. We have the Gospels. We have the Church of which Christ is head. It's all more real than a dream experience. It is by faith to be certain but its faith rooted in reality. Its faith rooted in the stones echoing from the empty tomb. He is not here! He has risen. Alleluia. Alleluia.

We have gained an hour and for many of us, the brief reprieve it has offered is already used up. And then spring comes when clocks move forward. And time just speeds up more. We may be weary. But we can see the Light. We know of His great love for us. We shall join with the saints in light. It's a reality so certain that we have its possession even now. Turn away from misty dreams to something real. Turn to the Christ and he shall sustain you.

Amen.