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Colossians 1:1-8 – *This is the Gospel*

Preached at Trinity CRC

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1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Who here watches the NFL?

How many of you are Green Bay Packers Fans?

There is a story that’s told of former Packer’s coach and legend, Vince Lombardi:

It was the first day of training camp (1961)...

And the team was gathered around the coach waiting to get things started.

The Packers were coming off of a successful season having lost in the Super Bowl...

So you can imagine that the expectations were high...

The team probably wanted to get onto the field and begin work...

Focusing on those things that led to their defeat last season.

Instead Coach Lombardi grabs a ball and says: “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

40 professional athletes...at the peak of their game...

Men born to play this sport—

From peewee football, to high school games played under the Friday night lights, to the demands of college football, and now playing at the highest level of the game—

Lombardi brings them back to the most fundamental piece of the game:

“Gentlemen, this is a football.”

This would be like someone walking up to one of the Devries and saying:

“Gentlemen, this is dirt.”

Or saying to one of our nurses:

“This is a patient.”

Or saying to Frank VanBoom or Phil Valk:

“Gentlemen, this is a car.”

Vince Lombardi was bringing his team back to basics...

Back to the fundamentals of the game:

How to tackle and block...

Looking at page one of the play book.

We are coming off of an amazing weekend...

Celebrating 50 years of what the Lord has done in and through Trinity.

Our excitement and expectations for the church over the next 25 or 50 years are high.

Many of you are like the Packers at the first day of camp...

Seasoned Christians...

Walking with the Lord for decades now...

Beyond the fundamentals and ready for the technical stuff.

But this morning we're going back to the basics:

“People of God, this is the gospel.”

Before you decide that you're past this message—

That you already know about the gospel—

Hear this:

We are never beyond the gospel.

Paul is writing to a group of people in Colossae.

From the greeting we know that these people are Christians...they are believers—

“To God’s holy and faithful people in Colossae”—

And yet Paul is all about the gospel for this group of believers...

It’s not something they’ve moved past.

In Colossae and the surrounding areas there were some false teachings going around.

We’re never really told what the teachings are in the book...

But we know that they run contrary to the gospel message of Christ...

These teachings are basically saying, “The gospel is not enough.”

“If you want to experience a full relationship with God, you need to do XYZ.”

“You need to have ecstatic experiences, special knowledge, and certain practices.”

Today I think we experience some of the same problems...

On the one hand, we have an improper understanding of the gospel.

We try to add to it:

“God loves me, but he loves me more when I come to church.”

“God doesn’t love me when I cuss.”

“The more money I give away, the more God loves me.”

I think the biggest problem today is not an *improper/distorted* understanding of the gospel...

But a *lack of* (or no) understanding of the gospel.

Take out your mental notepads and pens and answer this question:

“What is the gospel? What is the good news?”

It’s a word that we’re familiar with—

Probably overly familiar—

Maybe we’re so familiar with hearing it that we don’t know what it means.

The Church Renewal Lab defines the gospel like this:

“The Gospel is the full and complete story of how God’s grace flows abundantly to all those who believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ and how that finished work of Christ is ushering in God’s just and loving Kingdom.”

There are many ways of describing or defining the gospel...

But there is only one object of the gospel...

**At its heart the gospel is “the good news of the person and work of Jesus Christ.”**

It is about Jesus, and what God did through him in his death and resurrection.

We’re going to go through one way of telling the gospel story...

So we know it for ourselves.

First is the gospel story using your hand.

Cupped Hand: “God created the world perfect in every way”

Tipped Hand: “The world fell into sin and all creation suffered”

Pinky: “I am a sinner and too weak to save myself”

Ring Finger: “God loves me unconditionally but he is righteous in every way”

Middle Finger: “God sent his best, Jesus, who took the curse”

Pointer Finger: “Jesus points the way to full life now and eternal life to come”

Thumb: “Jesus sent his Spirit to empower a God-centered life”

Thrust Hand: “All I need to do is offer all to him and receive his gift of life”

Cupped Hand: “Believers look to the day of God recreation of all good things”

(You could also use the 4 major themes of Scripture—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Recreation—to tell the gospel story)

People of God, this is the gospel.

The full and complete story of God’s grace through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And this gospel message—and the grace it communicates—impacts believers in three major ways:

**First, the gospel message communicates pardon for the past.**

At the beginning of this letter Paul says, “To God’s holy people” or “to God’s saints.”

This is a status given to the Colossians only by the work of Christ.

At one time they were unholy...

They were unclean or dirty...

And could not be in God’s presence...

This was the result of sin.

But because Christ offered his life for them...

They were now God's holy people.

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies...but now God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you *holy* in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation..." (Col 1:21-22)

The Colossians had pardon for their past...

And so do we.

Pastor Lew Smedes tells the story of a middle-aged woman who came to him hurting and shamed...

She recently went through a divorce telling him, "I will never be able to forgive myself."

She was beat down by a religion without grace...without pardon.

Without grace our sin has a *forever* aspect to it.

We will never be able to live up to the perfect standards of God...

And certainly not when we look at our past.

But the gospel message tells us that God offers us grace.

Grace to you when you sin big or sin little;

Grace to you when you sin consistently;

Grace to you in your guilt and in your shame.

Even though there may be a lot wrong with you...

May God convince you and persuade you that you are holy and loved. (Smedes)

Jesus Christ died for these sins...

And you are clean and holy.

It is only because of his work.

**Second the gospel message communicates power for the present.**

In v. 6 Paul says, "the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world."

He doesn't say, "*you* are bearing fruit..."

(He does recognize that they have faith in Christ and love for all God's people...)

But he doesn't attribute it to them...

Rather, it comes from the gospel.

“The *gospel* is bearing fruit in the whole world just as it has been doing among you...”

The gospel is not just our ticket into heaven when we die...

It's not just our pardon for the past...

It is actually what is bearing fruit in our lives today.

This is why we never grow out of the gospel...

Why we never move past this fundamental teaching.

If we want our church to grow spiritually in the next decade...

Seeing more committed disciples in love with Christ...

Our friends, children, and neighbors;

If we want our church to do good works in our neighborhood...

And continue to develop life-transforming relationships with our community;

Then the gospel needs to be at the center of everything we do.

There's no building project, no staffing structure, no program adjustments that will make the smallest difference...

If the person and work of Jesus Christ is not central.

Because it is the gospel that is bearing fruit among us...

This is the power in the church.

By God's grace he is inviting us into the work that he's doing among us.

If you are looking to grow spiritually...

Or if you are looking to have fruit produced through your life...

Stay rooted in the Gospel.

### **Finally, the gospel message communicates hope for the future.**

The true message of the gospel told the Colossians about a hope stored up for them in heaven.

Later on in the chapter we learn that this hope is nothing other than Christ himself...

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (1:27)

This is a hope that does not fade.

It doesn't grow mold on it after time...

It doesn't rot...

And nobody is able to run off with it when you're not looking.

This is a hope that gets us through seemingly impossible times...

When loved ones are suddenly taken away from us;

Or when it feels like the problems of the world are going to drown us.

We are given a promise that the Lord has not abandoned us in this world.

He promises to come back and restore everything he has created.

And while we wait for a future where sin and brokenness are no more...

We hold firmly to this hope...Christ in us.

The gospel communicates to us the grace of God in our past, in our present, and in our future.

May we as a church—

50 years old now—

Build our next days, weeks, months and years, on the firm rock of the gospel...

God's love for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.