

**Walk in Him**  
**Colossians 2: 6-23**  
**Don Lincoln**

June of 1977, I had graduated from college and would attend Seminary in the fall. I needed a summer job to help pay for my first year of Seminary. I had worked two previous summers in churches doing youth ministry. Internships in large congregations – GREAT experiences – formative, and confirming of my growing sense God was calling me into pastoral ministry.

But in 1977 jobs were scarce. The only summer job I could find – church related or not – was a modest paying part-time internship at White Oak Presbyterian Church, a congregation of a few hundred members in Cincinnati that wanted someone to lead a summer children's program – Tuesday and Thursday mornings – for elementary age kids all summer long. I had taught third grade Sunday School one summer during high school with a friend of mine – and I thought "OK, I can do this." And, **I really needed a job.**

My first Tuesday eight kids showed up, ranging from **first to sixth grade**. Some of you know what that means! The program was from 9:00am to noon. By 10:00am they were bored stiff. They didn't interact with me like middle and high school students had. They didn't interact well with each other. By noon I wasn't sure any of them would come back Thursday, and I wasn't sure I would either.

In one day, feeling like a complete failure, certain I would never survive 19 more Tuesdays and Thursdays like that, questioning ministry, wondering about seminary, I went in the church sanctuary after the kids left – and found myself reading this text from Colossians. "**As you therefore have received Jesus Christ the Lord, you must walk in Him.**" Our text says "live" – but our footnote and my New American Standard Bible said "walk" – which I actually like better.

As I've done during difficult times in every church I've served – I went to the piano in that big, vacant, quiet worship space – and began to play. (And I've done it here, too.) And a little melody and simple chord progression came to me for that verse – only time that's ever happened in my life. **(SING)** *As you therefore have received, Jesus Christ the Lord. You must walk, you must walk, you must walk in Him.* And I sang it over and over – tears in my eyes, as God reaffirmed in my heart and my mind that He had a plan for me and that Jesus Christ was sufficient for me – I should hold fast to what I knew; He would carry me through. And He did.

It wasn't an easy summer. It was a formative AND humbling time for me. It gave me my first taste of what would be a great, lifelong appreciation for people who do children's ministry. And it evidently meant something to one family with kids in the program, who invited me to dinner the night before I left for seminary, and as I was leaving their home, the dad handed me a personal check for 25% of the cost of my first year at Princeton.

As you heard in the reading – Paul is calling the Colossians to remember their roots - their grounding in Christ. The latter portion of the text explains why. Paul has heard of those insisting Christ alone is insufficient. The Colossians are being taunted by those who suggest they need something additional – philosophies; heavenly beings; self-debasement, asceticism; rules on what to eat and what not to touch – additional requirements for their salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Paul’s language is pointedly clear in this text. Don’t let anyone take you captive; do not be beguiled by anybody’s smooth talking. Let no one make you their “prey” – literally “kidnap you.” Beware of those who wish to carry you off as their spoil of their work in the world by insisting on the necessity of additions to Jesus Christ.

As with the Christ Hymn of the first chapter, Paul recites a litany of all that is contained in, accomplished through, completed by Christ. In Him all divinity resides; in Him you are fulfilled; in Him you were circumcised in your heart. You were dead in trespasses, but God made you alive together WITH HIM – forgiving all your trespasses, erasing the record that stood against you. He disarmed all the authorities who would try to have their way over you. The work is done. That is the word you received initially – stand firm in it.

Whether or not you’re being tempted by heavenly beings, new moons and the observance of festivals; or any of the things the Colossians are facing, chances are you and I have at some point heard those voices – in our ear; in our heart; in our head – suggesting we’re not quite right – “You really don’t understand what you’re talking about!” Suggesting we don’t have what it takes – our faith is too elementary and childish: “Who believes such things anymore?” Or circumstances of life have pounced on you and given rise to doubts – fears – anxieties – is this God – this faith – really real?

To all of us – just like to those in Colossae – Paul writes: Hold fast to what you know in Christ. As you initially received this news about Christ or accepted the truth of His saving love, stand firm in that. Whenever it came to you – maybe it was in Sunday school – maybe it was in a children’s summer program ☺ - whenever it was you received in your heart and in your mind the good news of God’s grace; when it became known to you, remember that and stand firm in that. Let nothing threaten or shake that foundation in you.

One scholar says verse 6 & 7 are the whole point of the letter. Look at the text with me.

**Be rooted in Him**, like a tree, which holds fast and gets sustenance via those roots.

**Grounded in Him** – the language used in construction of a foundation for a house. Be grounded, be built up, have deep footers that will withhold and withstand whatever storms come.

**Established in Him** – the language of a legal contract.

Three metaphors to make his point, that our **whole** lives should find their very substance, their grounding in the conscious presence and power of Jesus Christ and His work. With Him we cannot be shaken, or kidnapped, or hoodwinked by any force.

After that summer job, in fall of 1977 I found myself a week into seminary, overwhelmed by the suggested reading list from my professors; challenged by the theology they were pressing me to explore, and a little threatened by the variety of interpretations I was hearing from professors and older students. It was a little scary.

A group of us first year seminarians were in the dining hall commiserating about the challenge the first week had been and wondering about being there, when Dr. Bruce Metzger came in the room, saw us first year seminarians, sat at our table, and asked how it was going? He is a very kind gentlemen, older guy so we shared with him: how it WAS going!

Now you need to know that Dr. Bruce Metzger practically wrote the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and chaired the translation committee for the NRSV. He had more degrees than I could name, and more honorary degrees than anyone I knew. He is an incredible, world renowned, New Testament scholar.

In his kind and gentle voice, this world scholar said to us “Brothers and sisters; do not let anyone – no matter how many letters they have after their names – threaten the faith that brought you here. Pointing to himself he said, “None of us has any better access to Jesus Christ than each of you. Don’t let anyone cause you to question what Jesus has accomplished for you, and for me, and the world and why He called you to this place.” I’ve never forgotten that gift from this brilliant man.

Occasionally someone will say to me, “I know I need to be a better Christian.” That’s a well-intentioned desire, but it is clouded with a spirit of judgment. The journey to being a better Christian never starts with that sentence. The journey to being a better Christian starts when you and I are gripped by the grace of God. It begins when the unconditional love of God becomes our prize and treasure, and we walk every day confident in that truth.<sup>2</sup> Like I said, “Live” in Him in verse 6 literally translates as “**walk**” – which describes the EVERYDAY ness of what it means to belong to Christ, and I love the idea of journeying every single day with Christ.

I remember asking someone once, “Are you a business-woman who happens to be a Christian, or a Christian who happens to be a business-woman?” Think about it. Are you a dad who happens to be a Christian, or a Christian who just happens to be a dad? If you’re walking with Christ, in Christ, in Him – you’ll know the answer. And let no one take that away from you.

Hold fast to what you received. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Your Lord and Savior. My Lord and Savior. The Savior of all the world!!

And if you don’t know that in your heart – when you receive the elements from this table today, signs of His promise and presence, evidence of God’s grace in our midst,

prayerfully tell Him you want to receive Him, accept Him as Lord and Savior. Trust me, I promise you, you'll find out, as the old Rogers and Hammerstein song says, "You'll never walk alone."

Trust what you have received – Jesus Christ, this Lord.  
Thanks be to God. AMEN.

1. The Rev. Dr. Mark Achtemeier, author, theologian, former professor of New Testament from Dubuque Seminary, SKYPE conversation with Westminster team about the Letter to the Colossians.
2. Patrick Johnson, First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC; *Walk In Grace*, July 24, 2016.