

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

Box 93, Dresden, Ontario N0P 1M0

519-683-2442 standrewspcdresden@gmail.com Rev. Andy Cornell

Worship This Week Sept. 25, 2022

WELCOME:

PRAISE SONGS: Shepherd of love, Spirit of the living God

YOUNG & YOUNG AT HEART -- Rita

SONG: This little light of mine

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYER:

SCRIPTURE – Colossians 2:5

For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

MESSAGE:

Let's recap. Paul has just told them to beware of false teachings.

There is no shortage of alternative truths in this world for the simple reason that the enemy has his way. God has allowed Satan enormous power. It's not ultimate power: God the Father can intervene – and He does – if it's in His will and helps achieve his plan or protects his people. Not all the time, because sometimes, God's chosen ones are meant to go down. It's part of the plan. We are all small players in a large drama – a never ending story or series – that has a new installment every morning.

False teachings are nothing new. The enemy has whispered in our ears from the beginning of time, "**did God** really say that?" Paul is reminding them (and us) that there is no true wisdom outside Christ and to know Christ is to live so we won't be deceived "with well-crafted arguments." Accept the Lord. Drawn near to Him. Submit to Him. Easier said than done. But in this fallen world (and as sinners) we need constant reminders.

Now let's turn to this week's verse.

First, Paul points out the obvious, that he is “far away from you.” Think of Paul as the anxious parent whose kids have gone off to college or moved out of town – gone out west to seek fame and fortune – or at least their place in the world. They’ve left home for the first time. Most of us have been there in our younger years and we know the challenges, temptations and dangers. There’s a long list of things that can and probably will go wrong.

Parents never stop being a parent even if their children are thousands of miles away. Paul is their spiritual parent. Although he didn’t actually plant the church in Colossae, he was called to oversee believers everywhere. It was his holy duty. It’s why he said, “my heart is with you.”

Let’s talk about the heart for a bit.

Paul had what a spiritual psychotherapist would call a “compassionate presence.” The human heart and brain emit what’s called “bioenergetic or electromagnetic fields.” It’s hard science, part of the study of biology. Studies have shown that the heart gives off much more energy than the brain. Again, this is more than theory; it’s been physically measured and studied. It’s a relatively new field of study and knowledge is in its infancy. But there are close ties to healing. Perhaps you’ve heard of Therapeutic Touch – which stimulates the body’s natural healing process. It’s generally accepted as a valid practice in professional nursing and in spiritual care. It’s based on the idea that human beings are energy in the form of a field. When you are healthy, that energy is freely flowing and balanced. In contrast, disease is a condition of energy imbalance or disorder. The human energy field extends beyond the level of the skin, and the practitioner connects with that energy using the hands as sensors. Therapeutic Touch is a bit of a misnomer because in practice, the hands don’t actually touch the patient in most situations.

Now, take that and add a spiritual dimension. The heart’s energy is amplified by our personal faith – and the Holy Spirit does the rest. God opens the doors, does the heavy lifting and moves across distances. This is why we can pray effectively for people who we’ve never met – as in Paul’s case with the Colossians.

Paul spent a lot of time in prayer. Sitting in a prison, it's about all he could do, aside from writing letters, ministering to the other prisoners and occasionally seeing visitors. **The power of** prayer knows no boundaries. Distance is nothing in the Heavenly realm. Witness the healing Jesus was able to do by saying the word:

- **Syrophoenician** Woman's Daughter in In [Mark 7:24-30](#) and [Matthew 15:21-28](#)
- The Centurion's Servant in [Matthew 8:5-13](#) and [Luke 7:1-10](#)
- The Capernaum Official's Son in [John 4:46-54](#)

James said: "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." James 5:16

Paul was an elite prayer warrior.

Put it together. Prayer plus heart. When Paul says his "heart is with you," we know it's way more than a Hallmark greeting card or feelgood Facebook post. It's way more than positive emotion or the power of positive thinking. This is the power of the Holy Spirit working through believers.

We can interchange the word "faith" here as well.

This is what the early church was taught by being in the Holy Spirit. It wasn't just on the Day of Pentecost – the birth of the church as we know it. Being part of the worldwide Body of Christ, united in Spirit (*Holy Spirit* – we must make that distinction) means we literally tap into the Kingdom. Think of it as plugging in to God's Spirit.

How much faith do we have? We can illustrate by a low amp extension cord. Or we can work up the faith and plug in with a powerful connection – like the cord we use for an RV or a clothes dryer which requires its own circuit. That's a good illustration of the power of our prayers. We're invited to amp it up. The choice is up to us.

Because of his faith, Paul had a powerful praying presence. His faith connection was heavy duty. That same spiritual power is freely available for us today.

Paul is saying that although he is absent from them in body, he is present with them in spirit. Again, this is more than superficial well wishes, smiles and chuckles.

When we are present with others in Spirit – whether they are in the same room or miles away – and if it’s the Holy Spirit, then powerful things can happen, as James attests. This is how the church not only survived in the early years – when the enemy could have wiped them out – but actually thrived and grew exponentially in the face of persecution and death. Remember, Paul is in prison for his beliefs.

Back to the verse. A significant factor in the church’s growth was the fact that they had the right beliefs and as Paul said, “living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.” Lifestyle and faith can take us a long way. What does it mean? Read the first chapter of this letter.

- Be tied together in love – Agape (God) love in addition to romantic or brotherly/sisterly love.
- Know Christ, who is our deep and endless source of wisdom and knowledge. “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.” -- Philippians 3:10
- Believe that there is no true wisdom outside Christ.
- Accept that only in Christ do we truly come alive – it’s in him that we can have freedom from the enemy’s lies. “For to me, living means living for Christ . . .” -- Philippians 1:21

It’s all about Christ. Believing in him, knowing him, living for him, dying (to ourselves) for Him and perhaps even dying in the flesh for Him.

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” – 2 Corinthians 5:17

In practical terms, there’s no magic checklist. We are all different. God has a pure and perfect plan for each of us. Of course, there are common essentials – an

active prayer life, knowing scripture, a willingness to allow Christ to be our foundation and then submit every corner of our lives to Him.

We are invited to plug ourselves in to the Holy Spirit with renewed faith – the kind of faith that requires a heavy-duty clothes dryer/heavy equipment extension cord.

I'm going to leave us today with a quote from Billy Graham.

“Canada stands for peace in the world. Canada has not taken sides in many of the world’s disputes, such as Vietnam and so forth in the past. And you have a spiritual heritage here in Quebec and Ontario and Western Canada. You have the spiritual groundwork; it’s already here. And there’s an afterglow I think you feel. People are not attending church today in Canada as they once were. Toronto was once called, when I first came here, ‘Toronto the Good’ because so many people went to church, so many people believed in God, in Christ. But I believe Canada stands in a very unique position. If Canada should have a spiritual awakening, and a spiritual revival, I think it could lead the world. I think the whole world would look to Canada. And I think Canada could become the world leader in the spiritual dimension.”

I don't think this is far fetched. Yes, 1978 is a long time ago in human terms – 44 years is half a lifetime for many. Yes, our world has changed. Church decline has continued. BUT consider that Canada has experienced great number of immigrants – many of whom have more faith than people who have been here for generations. It’s a fact. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, there are two types of congregations which are growing. First are those which are evangelical and Bible believing. The second are those which are not Anglo – they’re Korean, Chinese, Hungarian, African and Arabic. But much of what Billy said remains true. So while 44 years is a long time, remember that for God, a thousand years is like a day – 44 years is like five minutes.

It won't happen unless we, in the church, are willing to step up and plug ourselves back in to the Holy Spirit and allow God to bring us to life. I see signs. I see hope. It starts one person at a time. It is possible for the simple reason that nothing is impossible for God.

I'm going to suggest that the biggest challenge of the church today is the unwillingness to be set apart. We are not "living as we should." If the enemy has control of the world and we refuse to give in, then the church should stand out as something different.

Instead:

- We change our teaching and doctrine to be accommodating in the false belief that to be truly loving we need to accept choices of lifestyle and identity.
- We spend more time taking care of the building (which is easier) than the people (which can be messy). This is not to criticize those who are called to take care of the physical assets – because we need them – it's just that there's a deficit in the people department.
- We don't proclaim scripture and witness our faith in public ways because we don't want to look like Bible thumpers. Instead, we try to make up for it through social justice. Both are important, but like the building and the people, there's an imbalance.

I won't go on. The result is that we blend in with the rest of our culture. Fifty years ago, there were 22 congregations or mission fields in the Presbytery of Essex Kent. Today, there are 10 and only six of them can support a minister. In the best case, we're treading water. A church that's growing in North America is rare. It doesn't have to be this way. Instead of throwing up our hands in frustration and despair – which is the easy way to deal with it – we are invited to stop, drop and pray.

Ask ourselves a few questions.

1. Do you believe that God's hands are working in the world?
2. Has the Lord touched you? Has He spoken to you, provided strength, peace, hope. Has He healed you in any way? Has He done the same for friends and family?

3. At the same time, do you believe that there are many people who are spiritually lost or even dead and aren't heading to the Heavenly Kingdom?
4. Do you believe that while God has gifted us with brains and talent and we can do a lot to help ourselves and heal our bodies, we have no power to save our souls.
5. Do you believe that while the sun will eventually burn out and this planet will eventually pass away, the Kingdom of Heaven and the Word of the Lord will never die?
6. Do you believe that keeping the word of God alive and doing our part to save the lost is by far the most important thing we can do in this life?

I believe most of us here would answer “yes” to most of those questions, if not all. Even if you answered “yes” to just one, we can do more.

Do we have the faith – in God and in ourselves? Paul was pumped that the ancient church's “faith in Christ is strong.” It's what sustained them and fueled their growth. The same faith is why this congregation in Dresden is experiencing some growth. It's why churches in the global South and East are growing, even and especially in places of persecution.

This is now great awakenings happen. The church has experienced these revivals on a global scale at various times in the past 300 years. Britain and America mostly. It's fascinating reading if you ever want to search it out. Plenty of material on the web.

Here's the great hope. There are many church leaders who believe we are overdue for the Next Great Awakening. God has been preparing for this by allowing many corners of the church to decline for the last 50 years while seeing a revival in churches which are centred on the work and person of the Holy Spirit. I am among those pastors who believe that the groundwork for something powerful is happening.

Here's what each of us can do:

- Keep working to adopt a more Biblical lifestyle – because the alternative is to separate us from God.

- Submit to the holiness of God – adopt a Christ-centred mindfulness which is a complete childlike trust – because the alternative is dark and ugly.
- Pray – like your life depends on it. That’s not overstating it.

If enough believers realize that what we’re doing as a church in the West isn’t working, if we press the pause button – don’t close shop, just take a step back and take it in – and we submit to a genuine posture of prayer for however long it takes, there’s great hope.

HYMN: