

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

July 25, 2010

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Colossians 2:6-15

⁶As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹²when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

“Emergent”

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

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The balance of power has shifted in my yard. I think it has. I have a yard that has this balance to it. It is a version of the peaceable kingdom that I have grown to appreciate and enjoy. My yard is a place where bunnies and squirrels exist in this wonderful harmony. Bunnies chew clover while only a few feet away squirrels scamper through the tall grass.

There is a harmony among creation and the creatures that dwell in my yard. It's a good place even though I have had to lecture those cottontails about munching on my new shrubbery as a salad course.

But the balance of power may have shifted in my yard. It may have. The other day I was standing in my family room fairly early in the morning. I was looking out the windows when from the left hand side of the yard it emerged. A red fox. A red fox emerged from the side of the yard, scampered across the yard and up into the woods behind my house.

A red fox. He emerged. The balance of power in my yard may very well have shifted.

Emerged.

The fox emerged and everything shifted. Or has it? Has it really shifted? I have been telling others about that fox. I have been telling others and I have come to the realization that while this is the first time that I have seen him, he is not new. Others have seen him. He has been around.

When I first saw him the other day I had visions of my little bunnies that I so enjoy watching being Mr. Fox's lunch, dinner, and mid-evening snack attack. I'll be watching a little more intently over the course of the next days to see if my squirrels and bunnies are as prevalent. Perhaps the fox is not new, but my awareness of him is new. My awareness of his presence has shifted my sense of harmony among the peaceable kingdom of the back yard.

It has to do with that concept of emergent. It is one of those words that is being tossed around in the church as of late. There is this talk of the emergent church. It grows of that sense that things have changed.

You and I know well that things have changed in the church. They have changed in this church and they have changed in every church. The word of church life has shifted. I don't mean to make it simplistic, but church used to be something that one did. It is no longer about doing something. It is not only about just showing up on Sunday's—it is deeper than that.

The old concept of church was that it was really a consumer good. You came to church in order to get something. And once you got that—hopefully in no more than an hour you departed and lived the rest of your week. And then you came back the next week. You came back the next week to get some more. It was a consumer good—your quantity of churchliness would deplete over the week and reset to zero and so as a good Christian you returned to get some more.

Such doesn't work anymore. I'm not so sure that it ever really did, it was just that the culture supported those norms. With the cultural shift the need for the consumer good of churchliness has shifted too.

In the emergent church—the way in which we are coming to understand church—things are not so static. It has less to do with coming here to get something and more to do with coming here to check your own reality with others who are seeing similar things out there that you are seeing. The emergent church is more about testing our God reality with each other—it is more about testing our experience of God with each other than it is getting God.

Such is why it is more about spirituality than it is about religion. It is about how we see, and perceive, and experience God corporately and

individually and in relationship with each other. That interaction emerges as the place where God's Spirit is alive, palpable, and visible.

When Paul writes to the church at Colossae he writes really to help them emerge into a reality that they have within them. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

These people were trying to figure out who they were as a community of faith. They had all sorts of options before them. They had tried out all different kinds of practices and were learning about a whole host of concepts that oriented them toward God.

The purpose of Paul's writing was to point the Church back to where they started. He pointed them to the cosmic Christ. He pointed them back to the reality of the one they were baptized in. They were to understand that all of who they were was grounded and founded on their relationship with Christ. No matter what they did their faithfulness needed to point them back to Christ as the standard upon which their lives were built.

It really had to do with remembering. The community at Colossae was to remember the Christ in which they were rooted and be built up in that. It was the orientation of their baptism.

Today we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism. It is not a magic moment. There is not great magic in the water. It is mysterious, but it is not magical. In fact, it is ordinary water. It is water run right from the tap in the kitchen sink. Joppatowne's finest water.

So why? Why do it at all? Why do this at all if nothing magical is happening here? Well, it is about emergence. Emerge. Emergent. Emergence. The process of emerging.

Baptism has not always been done in the sterile way we do it. We don't even really sprinkle water—we more touch it at best. There is no submerging of anything going on. We tend to chuckle at the notion of anything more than a wet forehead.

The understanding—the assumption of baptism—was that it included total submergence into the water. Down in and under the water. Hair wet and everything. So under the water where one cannot breathe symbolized death. Coming up out of the water symbolized life and resurrection. So symbolically one died with Christ and was risen with him.

The life of the baptized was a life of resurrection in Christ.

While we maybe could do with a little submergence, short of that we need a little emergence. We need an emergent understanding here. We need to allow an emergence to occur here. We need to let those foundational understandings of baptism come to the forefront. It is about being in Christ. In baptism we are raised to this new life where we are in Christ.

That understanding is literally to transform our view of the world. The balance of power is to shift. The balance of what matters and what does not is to be weighed literally by the way in which it checks into the reality of our life in Christ.

So baptism is that event which becomes the moment we look back to and use as the evaluative tool to measure what is happening in our life.

What is real in our world and what matters becomes evaluated based on our being truly alive in Christ.

That is not a once in a life-time event. It emerges as the event of our living. When we run into trouble and when we have that nagging and gnawing feeling inside that things are not going right—it is an indication that we need to look deeper and come back to our life in Christ.

Such was the work for the Colossians. “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

They needed to come back to their relationship with the living Christ and ask themselves about the vitality of that relationship.

We are the Colossians in our church and our lives. We can get distracted by many things. We can get involved in many day to day activities that call our attention away from what really matters. We can get absorbed into success and survival. We will fluctuate in both our lives and in our church too between striving for success and then in our moments of desperation striving to survive.

God calls us neither to success nor survival. God calls us to keep coming back that relationship. The challenge is to emerge from the success and survival race to the resurrected living of relationship in Christ.

I look at the squirrels and the bunnies and I wonder if they know about the fox. But I still see them out there chomping on the clover and scampering through the tall grass on the hill. I know that fox is out there somewhere but I challenge myself to hear the words of Jesus: “Consider the lilies of the field and how they neither toil or spin and yet your heavenly Father cares for them. Consider the birds of the air—are you not of more value than these?”

Oh, yes...emerge...emerge from the panic for survival and struggle for success. Emerge to the baptismal Colossians reality that nothing matters more than our relationship with Christ. It becomes the reality check to all our struggles, all our questions, and all our longings.

Remember your baptism and emerge to the reality that you are in Christ. Amen.