

Transfer Complete!

Last Sunday of the Church Year; Series C
Colossians 1:13-20

Sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light. At 6:30 pm on Wednesday, August 8, 2012 you could see quite a “light” display here in the Sanctuary at Atonement. At that time the sun, while on its way to setting for the evening, was positioned in such a way that when you looked at the back wall of the Sanctuary you could see its reflection. The reflection of the sun was centered almost perfectly over the altar and the vertical beam of the cross traveled right through the middle of the reflection. St. Paul reminds us this morning in his letter to the Colossians, “God, the Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:12-14).

We share in the inheritance of the saints in light. You and I have this in common with those first century Christians in the congregation of Colossae. As the children of God, the living saints of God, we have been redeemed and recreated as partakers in the one who is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). The light of God in Christ shines brightly in our hearts. In the image I described, the light also rested above the altar. In the Christian Church the altar symbolizes the place where God comes to be present with his people. The image with which I began the sermon could not reinforce that symbolism any better. When God brings us into participation in his kingdom, the light of Christ comes to us and within us to dwell.

Our Epistle Reading also reminded us that we have been delivered from the domain of darkness. In darkness we cannot see. In darkness we stumble around. In darkness we reach for something firm to hold onto so that we do not bump into things and trip and fall. The only way to be truly safe in darkness is to have light. When there is even the smallest amount of light that shines forth in a room of utter darkness you can see what you are doing. You can recognize the obstacles and so avoid them. In the light things are exposed, not hidden. St. Paul can tell us that as partakers in the light of God in Christ we have been delivered from a domain of darkness. The light of the world has come.

The Bible very clearly articulates that darkness is the opposite of light. Darkness is where Sin, Satan, and temptations dwell. In darkness the things contrary to God and his divine Will try to prosper. Perhaps this is why many crimes are committed in the cover of darkness. In darkness it is easier to hide. And so we may try to hide our pet sins under the cloak of darkness.

You and I have been transferred from the domain of darkness. We have been delivered from the lordship of the one who represents all that is opposite and contrary to God and his Will. It has all been defeated definitively. We have been *redeemed* by our heavenly Father.

Growing up in Michigan, I became accustomed to redeeming pop cans as a young boy. When my brothers and sister and I wanted a new video game system my parents drove us around all over the area of Lansing, MI one summer so that we could collect cans and redeem them for cash. In Michigan you even get ten cents for every can! Back then grocery stores worked on the honor system concerning the redemption of cans and bottles. We simply put the cans in a garbage bag and handed them to a person, the store clerk, letting the clerk know how many were in there. We would then receive

the appropriate amount of cash for the redemption. Now we have machines where we deposit the cans and receive the cash. But back then *you had to go through a person for redemption*. Paul reminds us that this is how it is for all who wish to be bought back and redeemed by God. You go through a person.

Through the beloved Son, Jesus Christ, you and I have redemption. What is involved in this redemption, though, is something far more precious than soda cans and cash. We are talking about human lives, flesh and blood bodies being purchased and redeemed not with cash or gold or silver, but with the innocent, precious blood of God's Son (Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, "Meaning of the 2nd Article of the Apostle's Creed"). And the result is not a pocket full of cash so that you can go buy the video game system you want. Rather, the result is forgiveness of sins so that you can get what you need—reconciliation with God once again. The transfer is complete. Out of darkness and into the light.

Let us once again consider the image with which I started the sermon. Notice how the cross is firmly rooted to the altar. If in the Bible the altar signifies the presence of God for his people and the place where sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins were made, then it is deeply meaningful that the cross of Christ is connected to our altar here at Atonement. The sacrifice for the forgiveness of Sin that God purchased for us close to two thousand years ago is an event that happened in human history and still has relevance for us today. So at that intersection of the vertical beam of the cross and the surface of the altar the past meets the present. The fruit of God's sacrifice is given to us on the altar, here and now. We kneel around that altar to receive the fruit of God's sacrifice in Christ every communion Sunday as we are given his body and blood for the forgiveness of all of our sins and are strengthened in our faith. We gather around the intersection of the cross and the altar in unity with God and in unity with one another—the communion of the saints.

Now let us bring the light back into our picture. In our image the vertical beam of the cross travels right through the center of the light. From the cross the light of God's salvation shines forth. From the cross we receive the light of Christ and have our "share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12). At the end of our Epistle reading we read that God is "reconciling to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). When God's light is present God's peace is present. When we share in the light of God in Christ, we share in God's peace.

At the intersection of the cross and the altar God comes to be present for us and to give us the gifts of his salvation. Perhaps it would also be meaningful to have that cross intersect with the pulpit, the lectern, and the baptismal font. Those are the places where God does his *transferring* work. Those are the places where God *completes* and *sustains* your transfer from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son. You and I have been to those intersections. We gather weekly in the Divine Service at those intersection points. You can have confidence that your transfer is complete and you have been redeemed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. You are forgiven even as you continue to receive his forgiveness.

So let us "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (Col 1:10). Let us forgive one another as we have been forgiven. Let us put the best construction on the words and actions of others. Let us share the joy of the Lord and endure in patience. Let us be people of thanksgiving. In these ways the Apostle Paul suggests that we can live as partakers in the light of Christ and share that light with all. Amen.