

“Delivered from Darkness”  
(Colossians 1:13-14)  
Pastor Espinosa  
Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text from Colossians 1:13-14: “<sup>13</sup> [The Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” And here is another more literal reading: “<sup>13</sup> [The Father] delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and translated (us) into the kingdom of the Son of the love of Him, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption [some ancient manuscripts: through the blood of Him], the forgiveness of sins.”

In Jesus’ Name. Amen. Most people will not argue that what is real; what is considered reality is what we can see and touch (what is detectable by our basic senses). Buddhism as a world-view (not really a religion per se) has some interesting ideas about the world itself, but even a good Buddhist will not cross a street if a truck is coming, no matter who says the truck is only an illusion. Ok, so most people would say, “What you see is real!” But is that it? Is what we see and feel the only reality? Strict philosophical materialists will say “yes,” and “if it isn’t matter [as in atoms and molecules] then it doesn’t matter,” because all that is real is only physical.

But does such a position even hold in a logical way? It is absolutely astounding that when one takes inventory of the major world views and religions, there is an overwhelming conviction and belief among the billions and billions of people on this planet that there is more to reality than just what we see and feel. There is something else out there. There is something else that is real. The Word of God totally and utterly affirms this. Scripture teaches that when you struggle and battle against anything in your life, anything that causes concern or stress; anything that tempts you to worry or be angry or afraid, listen Christian take stock, take inventory, make sure you are not limiting what is real and how you approach coping with that problem. It’s not just physical! The Word says:

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)*

Or consider when Elisha prayed for his servant’s eyes to be opened so that he would be able to see the army, horses, and chariots from heaven (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 6:15). Elisha’s servant was

terrified by the threatening *human* army that was able to destroy him and Elisha, but Elisha wasn't afraid, because Elisha knew the rest of reality, the greater picture, and complete reality.

But we play around with silly ideas along the way. Maybe the world is like the Matrix. Maybe we are living in an elaborate computerized program and all that we see is just pre-programmed. I kid around with my wife because have you ever noticed how often you might say something and a split second later that same word is repeated on television? That's just weird! But maybe it's because of the Matrix right? Recently, there have been some very interesting journal articles on modern-day theories of what amount to philosophical idealism. What we call, "door," "snake," or "truck" are just mental constructs that enable our survival. Evolutionary "seeing what we need to see" to survive, but what we see really isn't what is actual.

Ironically, such ideas deny reality. Yes, what is created includes the physical, but when the Lord created people He gave them not just bodies, but spirits. We have a spirit and that spirit makes us what we are. Our spirits lead our bodies to do what we do.

But if we ignore reality, then we only hurt ourselves. Last week I had a colonoscopy for colon-cancer screening. I could have avoided it and after drinking that stuff you have to drink, a part of me still wishes I *had* avoided it. I could act like nothing is wrong, when there could be. But the only way I can find out is through the medical procedure and the pathology report...in order to get the greater reality.

This is also true in human communication. We have information in us and this information is morphed into thoughts. Thoughts can't be weighed or dissected, and yet they are real. If we're having a problem in a relationship, we won't know the reality of the situation until those thoughts are shared. So there is nothing like openness in communication while being gentle and respectful. But if we never get those thoughts, then we can't respond to the reality of the situation.

There is a saying that "ignorance is bliss," but ignorance can kill you. It is important that we are living in view of all that is real.

Our epistle from Colossians is about the full picture of reality and it has immense ramifications for our lives dear Christians. Yes, there is the physical realm of things, but there is also:

1. The domain or authority of darkness.
2. The kingdom of Jesus Christ.

So yeah, it's easy to live in the part-reality of what you see, but how are you doing in response to the rest of reality Christian? How are you mindful and guarding against the domain of darkness? How are you living in response to the kingdom of Jesus Christ? If you play the ignorance is bliss game, you are living a part-life and missing all of reality...and this of course can have devastating consequences.

God wants you to know the full reality! Colossians 1:13 reveals that you have been "delivered" from the domain and authority of darkness. This is your new reality as a baptized Christian. This darkness is "horrible and monstrous" as one teacher puts it (Lenski, 42). In itself, this domain is much more powerful than any of us by ourselves. Only our Heavenly Father can rescue us from it. But to be in it is to be in the force, capacity, mastery, delegated influence, or jurisdiction of this power. It is to be completely dominated by it. What does it look like? It takes on many forms: one of those forms of the domain and authority of darkness is the form of what we have seen in our cities: gun-violence from some police and from some citizens rousing extreme fear in our country. Other countries are actually giving travel warnings to their citizens traveling to the United States. This is not just the physical. The enemy/the devil and his demons desire sheer destruction. Of what? Of everything. The destruction of bodies, of souls, of cities, of authority, of religious freedom, of marriages, of unborn babies, of God's good creation – changing male and female to gender neutrality – of families, of churches, of order, of good music, of good books, of sound minds...the enemy wants to destroy all that is good. That's what he does. This is darkness and this domain is real.

But it is absolutely fascinating that in this particular context in Colossians that darkness has a domain, but not a kingdom. It is relegated underneath a superior reality, a more predominant or more powerful one: the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Our chief response right now is the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to those full of fear and discouragement by the domain of darkness. We are to tell of what God has done about racism and fear and violence. All sin behind these was heaped upon His Son so that racism, fear and violence of all humanity would be cast into death and covered by His redeeming blood which purchases people living in fear of darkness into the light of the kingdom of God. People need to see other people – namely Christians like you – who not only SAY they believe this, but live it out. But how can you? You begin by taking stock of your reality.

Colossians 1:13 also teaches that the baptized Christian has been “translated” into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Not only have you LEFT one domain, but you have ENTERED INTO the kingdom of your Savior! And in this kingdom you’re protected from the domain of darkness. At VBS one of our Bible Stories to the children was about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who refused to worship a false god. What is so fantastic about this account is how they answered the threat of martyrdom. They said in effect that God could totally rescue them from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17), but if God chose not to, they STILL wouldn’t worship the false god (Daniel 3:18)! They had a grasp on total reality: they knew the physical, they knew the threat of the domain of darkness, and they knew the salvation of the kingdom of God!

The kingdom reality response to the domain of darkness is what counts brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you confronted by the demonic? Then pray and fill your house with the Word of God! Is your marriage threatened? Then clothe yourselves with humility and serve your spouse with unconditional love. Are you struggling with your children? Be strong and courageous and love them with the law and with the gospel. For every word of correction, strive for a word of grace and love. Are you concerned about our nation? Then pray for her and be salt and light. Be a part of the solution. Do good works to build unity between people living out what the Christian Church has always done: serving all people with the unconditional love of Jesus Christ regardless of their color, background, or other affiliation. When we engage in works of love and service in this world we demonstrate what our Confessions call good works, namely “Christ’s battles”. The Lord mightily counters the works of darkness through His works of light in and through you!

All of the Lord’s kingdom resources are yours now dear Christian! And it is all because He has purchased you through His blood from a domain to a kingdom! The Large Catechism teaches on how we ask for this kingdom daily in the Lord’s Prayer when we say, “Thy kingdom come”. [Large Catechism, Part III, 49-50]: “Here we ask that his kingdom may come. Just as God’s name is holy in itself and yet we pray that it may be holy among us, so also his kingdom comes of itself without our prayer and yet we pray that it may come to us. That is, we ask that it may prevail among us and with us, so that we may be a part of those among whom his name is hallowed and his kingdom flourishes.” (Tappert 426) The Christian counters hatred with love; the Christian counters alienation with reconciliation; the Christian counters violence with service; the Christian lives the truth of the greater reality and they know the truth: [Large Catechism, Part IV, 24]: “To be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever.” (Tappert 439)

You live this way because you have the forgiveness of sins, and this forgiveness or remission means that God has sent your sins away so that they can never be found again! And with “translation” into God’s kingdom we have the ability to see complete reality: this redemption of Christ means that He suffered for us and this means a “passing over”. Death and darkness have passed over us, so that we have passed over from the devil to Christ, and as Augustine said, “from this tottering world to [the Lord’s] most solidly established kingdom. And therefore we pass over to God who endures so that we may not pass over with the passing world.” (Ancient Christian Commentary IX, Augustine, 8-9)

You know your reality. What you see, yes, what you know about the attack from darkness, yes, and what you know about the victory of Christ’s kingdom, yes! In this way, you are more than safe Christian, you share in the victory of the Redeemer and you are called to be light to the world and salt to the earth. Live in the greater reality. See reality for all that it is in Jesus Christ who has redeemed it!