

Pentecost 6 / July 20, 2025

Colossians 1:21-22

“And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, if you continue in the faith.”

Holy and Blameless before God in Christ

In this letter to the Colossians Paul presents the most important teachings about Jesus; the nature of His being and the effect of His sacrifice in the life of the human race and especially in the lives of believers. Jesus is a human being, but more than a human being conceived and born in time, He is the Son of God begotten of the Father from eternity. Paul writes, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the first begotten of all creation. For in Him all things were created.”* St. John said, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”* He is before all things. In Him all things have being and are held in being. He is the source of life for all things living.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God, but more than the Divine Being, He is also a human being conceived and born in time. St. John said, *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* Paul writes, *“In Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.”* This is important for us and for the purpose for which He came, which was to reconcile humanity to God in the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of His body on the cross. Through Jesus, God from eternity and a human being in time, God reconciled us to Himself, as Paul says, *“making peace by the blood of His cross.”* He did this so that He might redeem us from our sins, free us from the control of our sinfulness, deliver us from the condemnation of death so we would enter His presence, holy and blameless and above reproach.

Paul begins our text speaking to our condition, the human condition before Christ came into the world; before He comes into a person's life and before He came into our lives. He says, we were alienated from God, hostile to him in our spirits and doing evil deeds in our bodies. Alienated is an interesting word. It is from the root word 'alien', which we generally associate with extra-terrestrials. Alien is also a legal term for people living in, or visiting a foreign country. If you are not a citizen you are an alien. There are two kinds of aliens, legal and illegal. A legal alien is a person who has been lawfully admitted into another country, either as a permanent resident, or as some form of visitor. A person who enters another

country without legal sanction is considered to be an illegal alien. Illegal aliens are subject to deportation upon identification by immigration authorities and their agents. They have no legal right to be in the country. When a person loses their status as a visitor or resident alien, they are alienated. That means they no longer have the right to live in that country. If a person who is a permanent resident of a country is convicted of a serious crime, she or he may be alienated, declared unwanted, deported and returned to their country of origin.

The first humans were residents of God's Garden and lived in His presence. They became alienated from God when they disobeyed His command, ate the fruit He had forbidden and tried to cover it up by passing the blame to each other, the serpent who deceived them and even to God, who created and gave them to each other. The Lord tried, convicted and deported them from His presence in the garden. To ensure they didn't try to re-enter the garden illegally, the Lord placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the border to prevent entry. The consequence of their sin was that they, their offspring, including you and I, are alienated from God. The effect of this alienation is that we are hostile towards God in mind and action; hostile towards others and towards one another. Jesus came to restore a good relationship between God and us. In Christ, our heavenly citizenship, as Paul calls it in the letter to the Philippians, is restored. When Christ returns and calls us to rise, He will open the gates of heaven and present us to the Father, holy and blameless and without reproach.

Jesus reconciled the entire human race to the Father in the body of His flesh by His death. Jesus' sacrifice paid the debt for the sin of the world. We receive reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus and baptism into His death and resurrection. Jesus unalienates us, restores heavenly citizenship to us, through faith inspired by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the gospel. He stamps the seal of guarantee on our heavenly citizenship in our baptism. Paul writes in the next chapter, *"In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism."* Baptism is the circumcision of Christ. Faith comes through hearing the word of Christ as Saviour and Redeemer. In baptism God sets His seal of promise on us. Even as God set His seal on Jesus when He was baptized, so He sets His seal on us in our baptism. Even as He declared Jesus His beloved Son in His baptism, He declares us His children in our baptism. Baptism is God's declaration that we are no longer alienated from Him, but citizens of His heavenly

kingdom, Children divinely adopted, dearly loved, cleansed and redeemed by His blood.

In his first letter, St. Peter says that baptism saves us, *“not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus.”* Baptism saves us not as a work we offer to God. Baptism saves us as God’s work in our spirits, offered to us in the gospel, received through faith in Jesus. In baptism, God gives us a share in Christ’s resurrection and the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. A person naturalized as a citizen is no longer considered an alien. They have been adopted as citizens by their new country. In a similar way God has adopted us as citizens of His heavenly country for the sake of Jesus and the sacrifice of His cross. The Spirit who creates faith in our hearts, gives baptism as the outward sign of our adoption, Baptism is His pledge and promise of our eternal citizenship, which we will receive in its fullness when Christ presents us before Him, holy and blameless and above reproach.

We begin worship each week with the remembrance of our baptism, confessing our sins and sinfulness, returning to God’s promise of forgiveness in absolution, so we may be empowered to walk in newness of life. We confess our sins and continuing sinfulness, so that we might hear God’s assurance of forgiveness for the sake of Jesus, receive again His righteousness that covers our unrighteousness and be reminded of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us that we might walk in His power in the newness of life. Paul writes in our text that Christ has reconciled us to the Father through the blood of His cross that He might present us holy and blameless and without reproach, *“if you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel.”* That’s a big ‘if’. It leads to ask how we continue in the faith and what we have to do to remain stable and steadfast in the hope of the gospel? The simple answer is we have to keep on believing. To keep on believing we have to continue in the truth of the gospel. We continue in the faith by receiving God’s grace in Christ Jesus as it comes to us in the word of the gospel, the absolution of baptism and through the bread and wine of holy communion. Faith does not come not from within us, or by the exertion of our will. Faith comes from the Spirit of God who dwells within us. Faith comes through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit. God keeps us in faith through the word by working of the Holy Spirit.

That’s why we worship. That’s why we confess our sins and receive absolution. That’s why we hear the word and receive the sacrament. Those are the means through which God created faith in our hearts. Those are the means by which He

preserves our faith, so that we may be presented holy and blameless and without reproach in eternity. We abide in the faith by abiding in the things God used to create faith; the word, the water, the bread, the wine. Through these means of grace, the good work of faith which He has begun within us will increase and be brought to fulfillment in eternal life, when Christ presents us to the Father; holy and blameless and above reproach. God in His mercy, grant this to us all. In Jesus' Name. Amen.