

Rooted, Yet Walking  
Reading from the Old Testament: Psalm 85:8-13  
Reading from the New Testament: Colossians 2:6-13

This may be blasphemy in the South, but it has always seemed to me that Richard Petty strikes a rather odd profile: tall gaunt figure, boot-cut Wranglers, a silver platter-sized belt buckle, eyes hidden behind those 70's vintage wraparound shades, accented by that Magnum PI mustache, and that Plymouth-sized Cowboy hat with the explosion of bird feathers just below the crown, bringing to mind a bug smashed on a windshield. Do you think he wears that thing to bed? Somehow, that hat doesn't match that body, but don't worry Richard, I couldn't rock that look, either.

Many of us grew up watching commercials with King Richard standing by a royal blue and red Plymouth pouring that little bottle of STP additive into the gas tank like some high school miscreant spiking the punch at the Valentine's Dance. Now, I've been driving for 45 years, and in all that time, I've never poured STP or any other additive into my tank, being of the mind that, if you truly needed that to drive, wouldn't it already be in the gasoline?

However, whether it is your Chevy, your potted fern, your kitchen appliances, your barbecue pork, your roof gutters, your smartphone, your body, or your brain, someone is always intent on impressing upon you that what you truly need to make your possession actually work is to add their product. Paint sealants and fabric protection? Isn't that already supposed to be in the car already. Please tell me they didn't use watercolors at the factory. She drives great ... as long as it doesn't rain.

Food additives - Tartrazine. Aspartame. Octafluorocyclobutane. Who knew that some foods need the assistance of a propellant to get out of the can? You may want to remember that the next time someone tempts you with some tasty Cheez Spray. Any word with butane in it gives me pause. *Poor ol' Verne, ate that whole tube of Reddi Whip, but the couch was too close to those gas logs, and he just spontaneously combusted.*

People these days are more conscious of the additives in their food purchases and producers now are more likely to script their ads with promises that their products are organic, additive free, no added chemicals, non-GMO. People want to know that when they are eating a tomato, they are just eating a tomato.

Now, when Sirius-XM radio debuted, I felt the need to get my Mini Cooper wired for that addition. But so many things in this life stand well-enough alone and don't need any enhancement to be fully experienced, fully efficacious, and fully known. The Apostle Paul is intent on making the Colossians understand Jesus Christ as preeminent among those things.

“See 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. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.” To the Ephesians, it was written of Christ, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” And in John's Gospel, it is similarly expressed, “For of His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.”

Paul wants to be clear, the Good News is Jesus, not Jesus+. It seems the Colossian church was being visited upon by various self-identified experts, who, much like the aggressive salesman, want to

convince the church members that they definitely need to buy into various dealer add-ons for this whole Jesus thing to actually work. Their teachings were a way of saying Jesus isn't enough. *You need to buy my book on astrology, pay close attention to the movement of the stars and the phases of the moon; No, Jesus isn't sufficient unless you buy into my new diet plan, limiting yourself to two Kumquats and a Pepsi, three times a week; No, the pagan mystery cult over on Third Street, they've got it going on, that's what you need.* These teachers were adept at pressing people to conform to their own enhanced version of Christianity.

It's summertime, and along with the heat and humidity, summer brings out those college students hoping to slow their accumulation of student debt, and a certain percentage of them are coming to your neighborhood. You see, with minimal investment there are companies hoovering up a definite personality type for their teams of mobile cold-call marketing units – young, bright, gregarious, motivated, unselfconscious, engaging smiles, and facility with a sales pitch. Their grandparents sold Fuller Brushes, their parents pedaled World Books, and these kids are coming to your door to impress upon you that what's

missing in your life, what will make your identity complete ... is a pest-control program, a solar panel, the sharpest knife ever made. That's what is missing. Add the golden fleece package and angels will serenade you to sleep. And hey, these kids know your neighbors' names, and they report that three neighbors have signed on; and one of those, well, they hit it off so well that he is going to be the best man in your neighbor's wedding next summer. No,,. I'm afraid they don't have any written material, because they have a face-to-face philosophy. They'll answer all your questions. They've got the low-down, the skinny, the inside information.

These kids are bright. They are engaging. And they really do need the money. Have you seen the inflation of tuition? You'd like to help the person, but you are sure you do not need what they are selling. You don't want what they are selling. You have all you need. In fact, **to add something else would detract from what you already have.**

In response to the teachings and influence those self-identified experts were peddling in the Colossian congregation, Paul is intent on making it abundantly clear that what those false teachers are promoting is not necessary, and only serves to be a distraction from

what the Colossians already have by, in, and through, Jesus alone. “See 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. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him.”

That’s all you need. That’s your context for everything. Last week, a dear friend’s son, Joe Welker, was preaching also from Colossians, highlighting Paul’s emphasis on the singularity of Christ as our way to see, comprehend, and interpret the world, even the universe we encounter. He, too, saw the connection between Paul’s emphatic emphasis on Christ and those first images from the Webb telescope. Yet, with the eyes of one born into the dizzying whirl of technological advance and culture’s absorption by social media, he smiled as he asked the congregation, “Did anyone other than me look at the Webb images and think, ‘Hey, Jesus updated his profile picture?’”

I’m sure he was greeted with confused reactions, but he truly was onto something important. Remember what Paul said in Chapter 1 – “For in [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth

or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Seeing all there is through the singularity of God’s revelation in Christ is not only about eternity but is also, and just as importantly, about now and how we discover meaning as we approach the world – how we relate to everyone, everything, every challenge, every opportunity, every tragedy, every triumph, every choice, every dilemma, every plan, always asking, “So, how does this look in the light of Christ?” That’s not nearly as abstract a concept as you may think. In fact, it is extremely practical.

You could fill the Grand Canyon with all the websites, self-help books, podcasts, exercise programs, spirituality retreats, meditation methods, trendy authors, yoga mats, cookbooks, self-improvement coaches, and smoothie recipes that fill up your social conversations, your web searches, your planning calendars, your phone calls with friends, your conversations in the church parking lot, and they all arise, sometimes consciously, but often unconsciously, from your search for meaning, your desire for purpose, and your hope for wholeness. *Have you read... Did you buy... You must sign up...* And these are not inherently bad things; they may be good things; profitable things; happy things, but they cannot be a substitute for **the** thing.

Paul implores 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.”

I have to confess, at times I sense I’m rewriting that old song,  
*Sometimes I feel discouraged... Sometimes the shadows fall ...*  
*Sometimes I’m wondering where that Sparrow went.* I see people lining up for their millions as they watch the sales figures for their self-improvement books, their trendy seminars, their slogans for success; and I see the folks, good folks, good churchgoing folks filling their Amazon carts, downloading those podcasts, signing up for the seminars – their lives filled, yet unfulfilled, still yearning for more, for meaning, for understanding, for purpose, sometimes living lives of quiet desperation, open to anything that may fill their void, always thinking that next trend will bring them peace.

I get disheartened because they often do manage to make to the pew, but their brains are still dominated, still captured by the siren call of that next big thing. They may sign up for a sweat lodge in hope of meaning without ever having considered in depth what they already

have in the Word made flesh. They may spend their days posting articles about supplements, relationship secrets (*public service – beware of books with Secret in the title*); posting some reference to books with titles like *Recipes for a Sacred Life; The Road Less Stupid; Do Hard Things; The Courage to Be Disliked; Designing Your Life*; oh, and here's one – *Roar into the Second Half of Your Life*. ... I don't want to roar. I have no desire to roar. It hurts your throat. You lose your voice. I don't want that.

However, as your paycheck expands the self-help industry profits climb. Folks are out there searching, yearning, despairing. They're buying product; signing up for escapes, retreats, intent on finding or buying what's missing, haven't found it yet.

But I have to tell you, many will come on Sunday, however, based on their reading of scripture, their study of Jesus' words and Paul's council, I could stand up here and convince them that the Beatitudes are a chain of islands in the North Pacific; that the Sermon on the Mount is a rock sculpture atop Mt. Leconte; that the Good Samaritan is a tool available at any plumbing supply store.

You feel at a loss, maybe drifting a bit and needing purpose? Open the Bible and spend a week with the Good Samaritan, then go talk about it with someone you trust; maybe talk with Chad Reeves about the world he sees at Crisis Assistance Ministry; go be a mentor to a kid at Time-Out Youth.

You struggle with relationships? Spend a week with Romans 12; or better yet, read one of the Gospels, slowly and thoughtfully, not looking for answers, but asking questions (again, this requires community – like you may just find in church); and then memorize Romans 12. It's a whole lot cheaper than a spa and it won't wear off as quickly.

You think nobody understands you; nobody has the struggles you face? Read the Psalms, all of them, not just the easy ones. It's not always pretty, in fact a majority of them are pretty raw and real, revealing that there is nothing we can say to God that God hasn't already heard, and that God isn't big enough to handle (Remember – Jesus' profile picture). Then turn again to one of the Gospels and slowly, thoughtfully read through the story of Jesus' journey of what we call Holy Week.

“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.” Paul challenges the church to not let anyone disqualify us if we lack their additives, if we haven’t acquired what they say Jesus needs to be complete. For, as Paul says, in Jesus “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...”

The prophet Isaiah asks the question posed by this text long before it was even written, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?”

Competitive runners would (or should) easily understand our text. They don’t like to carry any extras, any baggage, anything that would weigh them down. They laugh at the newbies all decked out with these belts and vests loaded with bottles of water, gels, energy bars, their arms wrapped with the latest gadgets. They’ve got the sunglasses, phone pouches, earbuds, just about every item available in the running store. But the racing veterans are having none of that. They’re taking their race numbers and cutting them down, like a VBS craft, until all that’s left is the number alone. Olympic marathon legend Frank Shorter

used to take a paring knife to his racing shoes to cut off any parts that weren't absolutely necessary, anything to make them lighter. Even when the temperatures were in the low 40's my son would run without a shirt, and on these sweltering mornings of late I'd be tempted to do the same if it weren't for fear of being declared a public nuisance. Cut it all down to what is necessary. Trust the essentials.

Yeah, the runners should be able to get it. There is a point where any additives can offer no benefit and only serve to detract from what you already have in Christ. Maybe you just haven't opened the book to discover all that you already have in, through, and by Jesus, the Word made flesh. "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him." Amen.