

"Direction"

Text: Colossians 1:13-20

As Paul greeted the Church in Colossae in the verses that immediately precede this morning's text: ***"(May God the Father) fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of God's unlimited kindness:

I'm not sure exactly when it began, but in my mind one of the more telling polls is *"Direction of the Country,"* also known as *"Right Track/Wrong Track."* It's an *opinion* poll, of course, so it's based not so much on reality or science as it is on the individual's impression of reality and what the future will bring. It's a poll that seeks to track where folks *think* things are going. In other words, if things keep going the way they are, will our country be better or worse as time goes on.

Direction is actually a really big deal to Christians, or at least it should be. Christians recognize that almost nothing gets either better or worse all at once. Both improvement and decline are almost always gradual. So it is that we don't (or shouldn't) expect things like marriages, financial problems, and the like to get better all at once, we look at direction. Are things getting better or worse? If things go on as they are, a year from now will our marriage or our finances be stronger or weaker, better or worse? If the answer is worse, obviously something has to be done to reverse the current trend.

We need to ask the same questions of our individual spiritual state – our faith life and the relationship with our God. We need to do an honest self-evaluation to determine if we are growing or declining spiritually. The reality we need to face is that if things are declining, and we do nothing about it, catastrophe of the worst sort looms.

This idea or concept of direction is actually one of the key components of our text for this morning (in a number of different ways) and it is on that aspect of our text that we will focus this morning. That text is found recorded in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the First Chapter:

ESV Colossians 1:13-20 (The Father) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ ¶ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things

were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

These are the verbally inspired words of the Creator of heaven and earth. What thanksgiving ought to fill our hearts each time we hear or read what the one true God has preserved and delivered to each one of us, for by these precious truths we are both healed and saved. That our God would so bless each of us today through the study of these words, so we pray: ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

As the church year draws to a close this morning our task is relatively simple. All that we have to do is to draw three direction arrows in our minds. The first relates to our introduction and has to do with our own personal spiritual trend. The second has to do with our basic sense of whom or what our lives here on this earth are all about. The third puts it all into perspective when we draw the direction arrow of what our Savior has done for us.

The general topic of "direction" sounds simple, and it is. The problem is that *simple* isn't the same as *easy*. It is relatively simple to determine if we are growing spiritually or if we are declining. The remedy is also fairly simple, but actually putting the remedy into practice isn't always easy. Although it should be.

The questions we need to ask ourselves are, again, simple. "Is my faith growing stronger or weaker?" "Am I growing closer to my God or drifting away from him?" "Am I growing in my knowledge and understanding of God's Word, or am I forgetting even what I once knew?" If the answer to any of these questions is that my personal direction arrow indicates a decline, I need to first recognize the seriousness of the situation, and then take the necessary steps to correct the problem. Those steps, again, are simple, but for some reason we find them anything but easy. The solution always involves more exposure to the Word of God – which is the divine power by which we are saved. Decline is always a result of starving ourselves of that divine power that God himself has provided for us.

It all sounds so simple, but the hectic pace of our society makes it so difficult to follow through on even our best intentions. One of the problems is that the resolve and dedication that we seek are also gifts given to us through exposure to the Word of God. In other words, the more we read

and study God's Word, the greater our desire and determination to study that Word.

Many find it helpful to extend their personal direction arrow into the future and to examine the projected outcome soberly and honestly. In other words, the future of decline is eternal failure, while the future of growth is eternal life in heaven. This is how we remind ourselves that nothing on earth should be a higher priority in our lives.

The other exercise that many find helpful has to do with the other kind of "direction" outlined in our text for this morning. Listen again to some of the key statements that are found there that help to enlighten and direct us: ***"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."***

The Christian religion can be reduced to very simple terms. John 3:16 comes to mind. But there's another technique or exercise that involves mentally drawing a great big direction arrow. If, for example, someone asks about justification, the arrow points from God to man, since it is God who has declared man to be not guilty on the basis of what his Son did for us. Grace? God to Man. Baptism and communion? God to man. In all of these, God works in or on man. Yet when it comes to things like thanksgiving and praise, then the arrow is man to God.

All of those ought to be fairly obvious to Christians. There are some, however, that are not so clear. What about love, for example. Our natural inclination is to have the arrow point to ourselves. We want to be loved. Yet God's Word consistently speaks of love as an arrow pointing outward – to our God and to our neighbor – because that arrow first pointed toward us. God's idea of love is not when we seek to be served but when, like Christ himself, we seek to serve others.

Part of the problem here is that whenever someone in our secular society offers to help another human being to "gain direction" in his or her life, what are they almost always talking about? What are they offering? To whom or to what does that arrow almost always point?

The answer is that it points almost always to "self." That's the direction of the world in which we live, and we hear it advocated in our music, by our advertisers, self-help gurus, screen writers, authors, and poets. All point the big arrow of importance inward, to self, and justify such selfishness with hollow mantras like *"you can't take care of others unless you take care of yourself*

first." Obviously, at least on some levels, there is a germ of truth in that much abused statement, but a careful examination reveals much more lie than truth.

Would anyone really challenge the assertion that we are a self-centered, narcissistic people and that any encouragement for more of the same amounts to charging madly in the wrong direction? Our national mantra is: *"It's all about me."*

The problem here goes well beyond bad form or manners. The problem with any "me-first" society is that it stands in sharp contrast to God's Word and will. God's will is clear here, and there can be no doubt after rereading the inspired words of our text that *my life, as a Christian, is all about my Savior God.*" The big arrow points away from me and to my God. In fact if you happened to be counting, our text contains a total of 14 pronouns (He, Him, Himself) directing our attention to God and away from self.

Before we discuss the ramifications of this information, it should be noted that this is far from an isolated passage. This particular truth is established and reestablished throughout the pages of Holy Writ. 1 Corinthians 10:31, ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*** Again in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*** Over and over, without a single contradictory word or passage, the Bible draws the arrow from man to man's God. You and I are not the center of our universe. God is.

What exactly does this information do for us? How should it affect how we think, act, speak, and plan? The ramifications are absolutely all-encompassing. No facet or aspect of our lives is left out. Every single thing that we think, say, do, or plan is all supposed to be directed toward the glory, praise, and service of our God. Stop and think about that for a bit.

I'm not sure that self-centered human beings can actually take in and comprehend such far-reaching truth in one sitting. As the old car commercial used to say: *This changes everything.* It puts the eraser to all of the old questions and indelibly writes in new ones. Some examples will undoubtedly prove helpful. This means, for example, that career choices have little to do with me, and everything to do with my God. No longer is it *"What makes me happy?"* or *"What will result in financial success or prestige for me?"* Recognizing that the arrow is supposed to point to my God, the question now becomes, *"How can I best serve and glorify my God with the gifts and talents that he has given me?"* In short, our whole thought process is suddenly and dramatically altered.

One of the things that becomes immediately apparent is that God's view of things stands in stark contradiction to man's self-centered ideas. Our young people today tend to struggle with career choices for the most part because they have been counseled not to seek the glory of God and his service in whatever they do, but to investigate the deep recesses of their own yearnings and desires and to pursue whatever makes them truly happy. If that is the criteria, what are our young people going to come up with? If playing video games gives you joy, then try to find a job where you can play video games for a living. If you like to hunt or fish, maybe you can find some sponsors and do that for a living. You like those cool apps on your cell phone? Maybe create new ones as a career. Are you seeing the problem here? Point the arrow back to yourself and God is generally left out of the picture.

The great challenge, of course, is not so much identifying what you might be good at; it is figuring out how to use what God gave you to glorify him in all that you do. The fact is when you focus on your God and his glory and service, he always makes all the other things in life fall into place. Always.

But this brings us to the final direction arrow that we need to draw this morning. That last direction arrow is drawn by filling in the blank in this statement: *When it comes to Jesus Christ and his work of salvation, it is all about _____.*

The answer, of course, is "me." *When it comes to Jesus Christ and his work of salvation, it is all about me.*

Again, you see the problem immediately, don't you? Here the arrow points from Christ to me. Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter are really not all about Christ, are they? They are all about you and me. Jesus didn't come to earth to save himself; he came to save you and me. He didn't suffer and die to pay for his own sins; he suffered and died to pay for *our* sins. Jesus didn't leave heaven because he lacked something; he left because *we* lacked something. The arrow points right to you, and it is underscored each time you commune and hear those comforting, personal words: "***Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.***"

In this we recognize again the mystery of the gospel itself. The very one who, according to our text, ***created all things that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers,*** the very one who ***"is before all things, and in Him all things consist"*** – that is the one who decided to draw the arrow to you and me and to say, *"My life is all about you and your salvation."* The amazing result, again in the words of our text, is that ***"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."***

Because God determined that his Son – ***"in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"*** – would be all about us, now our entire time of grace here on earth *can and should be* all about him. Far from burdensome or oppressive, this is our great joy and privilege. Turn away then from the world's selfish, self-serving ambitions and desires and be true men and women of God – which is nothing more than our reasonable service. Jesus was all about our business. What a joyful privilege now to be all about his. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Malachi 3:13-18** "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'" ¹⁶ ¶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

ESV **Luke 23:35-47** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹ ¶ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." ⁴⁴ ¶ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

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The Last Sunday of the Church Year – November 24, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 340 (Stanzas 1-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul to Joyful Lays"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Malachi 3:13-18) We have again enjoyed God's grace – his undeserved love – through another church year. As we look back at the blessings of the past, it is also good and right that we look forward to the end of this present existence. Christians are often confused at how the wicked seem to prosper outwardly while believers routinely do not. In this lesson we are again reminded that God is not fooled. What a man sows he will also one day be made to reap. In other words, all will be called to account for their relationship with their God. Only those who trust Christ's payment for their sins will escape God's wrath on Judgment Day.

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 23:35-47) This is the account of the penitent thief on the cross – perhaps the clearest and most comforting source of proof that it is never too late for a sinner to turn from his wicked ways and live. We note here especially how clearly the idea of work righteousness is excluded, since the malefactor certainly had no way of earning forgiveness for an entire lifetime of sin – an admission that he himself made. Here we find yet more proof that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 433 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, My Truth, My Way"

The Sermon – Text: Colossians 1:13-20 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Direction"

The Offertory – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Stanzas 1 & 6) (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 340 (Stanzas 8-9) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul to Joyful Lays"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time.

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – In humble obedience to God's Word, we practice "Fellowship Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others (not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Thanksgiving Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Michael Eichstadt has returned the call to the faculty of ILC. Pastor Terrel Kesterson has returned the call to Bethel of Morris, MN. Bowdle and Ipswich have called Pastor Norman Greve. Pastor Emeritus John H. Johannes was called home on Thursday. Funeral services are planned for 4pm on December 1 at Luther Memorial in Fond du Lac, WI.

Annual CLC Grade School Basketball Tournament – The CLC Grade School Tournament is scheduled for March 13-15 at ILC. Parents with grade school aged students that would like to participate please contact Pastor Roehl for more information.

Thanksgiving Service – Our Annual Thanksgiving Service is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm. Our midweek Lenten services will follow on the three successive Wednesdays, December 4, 11, & 18.

Confirmation Class – Parents and students please note that Confirmation Classes begin at 5:45p through Advent.