

Date of sermon: 10/3/2020
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Col. 1:21-29
Title of sermon: **A Mystery No More**
Series: Against the Tide - #4

Colossians 1:21-29 NIV:

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. **22** But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23** if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. **25** I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— **26** the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. **29** To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Good evening, friends. Has this not been a crazy week? If you don't think this is a crazy week, you are prepared for anything. God might take you to who knows where, because this was a crazy week. We went from a debate that was -- well, I won't comment too much more than I did mid-week -- and then, sadly, at the end of the week, our president has got COVID. I'm a self-professed -- self-confessed, I should say -- news junkie. I like to watch the news. I was watching one commentator and reading some -- he was making a point coming out of the debate. He says, "One of the great fears," he says, "I have, is that our country is moving into tribalism. Where we define ourselves not as a nation but as tribes, mostly notably identifying ourselves by who we hate." You remember Rwanda? That's where tribalism leads you.

Tribalism is when we define ourselves not as image bearers of God, not as Americans, not as one nation under God. As people who see somebody else as outside my tribe who must be hated, or even worse, completely cancelled. They describe them as enemies. People who are a threat. I found that interesting, as he began to write about that, because I was reading this week about enemies, and how God sees enemies, relates to enemies and treats enemies, and how He asks you and me to treat enemies. Who are these enemies that God says, "Hey, this is who these folks are!" Well, I got news for you -- those enemies are you. At least you were. Paul is writing to this church, and he was telling them -- because they, too, it's by nature we like tribalism. By nature, we like homogeneity. We do. We like people. We like people like us, we like people who think like us, and we're threatened by -- that's the whole really issue of racism is a threat that somebody else poses to me, because they're not like me. They don't think like me, they don't act like me, they don't vote like me. And so, we like to create our little hibernation. Paul was writing to this group of people, just like you and me, and he said to them, "Once you were an enemy of God. You were alienated from him in your minds, because of your evil behavior. But now, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation -- if you continue in your faith."

I'm with this commentator. Terribly afraid that the body of Christ is buying into tribalism as much as anybody else. And I think God's word has something for us. It's about enemies. How does God see enemies, and how does He want you to? And Paul, in this text, tells them -- "Hey, I rejoice. I rejoice that you guys are friends with God, but it wasn't always that way. It wasn't! You weren't always friends of God. There was a season in your life when you were an enemy." What's an enemy? Well, it's a person who's described as alienated from God. What does it mean to be alienated from somebody? I was talking to somebody this week that he's separated from his spouse, he has an order dictated by police that she cannot come within, like, a hundred yards of him for a year! They're alienated. They aren't talking, they aren't communicating, they don't live together, they have lawyers who speak for each other. They're alienated. That's what it used to be like with you and God. You didn't talk to Him. Oh, you might think you did, but the reality is, you didn't have a relationship with Him, and so, you were alienated, but not only that, the scripture says that we were hostile. One of the great lies of our day -- it is absolutely a great lie -- and there's people in my own family who believe this, that we're born neutral. Good night, have you ever seen a one-year-old and can say that child is born neutral? Have you ever seen a two-year-old throw a temper tantrum? He's like, "Oh, it's just learning from its behavioral context." Ha! Are you kidding me? They're evil straight to the core! I know I probably just offended your grandkids, but God be with you, I mean, I'll just use my family. My kids at two -- I knew of depravity, I saw it, I witnessed it. Hostile! That's what the scripture describes us. My friends, that's not a passive person. That's not a person who's like, "Oh, not sure if I believe in God." No! That's a hostile person. What is a hostile person? It's a person who is not neutral. They actively work against, they take up offense against, they seek to overcome, to deny, or ultimately destroy. Wow. Paul's saying, "You were once enemies of God." Yeah. And because of that, you lived out this evil behavior.

What does it look like? I don't think I have to explain it to you. Yeah, I think you know it. It's a person who doesn't honor God's word. They don't honor marriage. They don't honor gender. They don't honor life. When a person says that, "I believe you can take a child's life all the way up to the last moment they're in the mother's womb," and they say -- "Hey, you can take that life, it's a woman's choice" -- that person is not arguing for a choice. They are taking on God. They are telling God, "I don't care what you think -- this woman trumps you." No -- no, no, no, no, that's hostile. That's not a person who has a neutral view of God. That's not a person who has a favorable view of God. That's a person who is evil in their behavior. God says that's who you and I were. Well, what did He do with evil people? Extinguish them? Get rid of them? Hate them? Send them out to Siberia? No. The text says, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death." It's rather obvious, but notice it doesn't say -- "He's reconciled you because you got your act together and you cleaned your life up." No. What does God do with His enemies? He transforms them by the blood of Christ. It seems like Paul didn't want to just stop with a little bit, he says he reconciled us through Christ's physical body, through death. See, it wasn't just that Jesus lived a holy life, as Pastor Jim said. It's that He died. This bread and this cup that we celebrated today -- it was representative of a real life and a real death that occurred for God's enemies. What does He do? Oh, it's miraculous. Look at this. It really is miraculous. Through His body He presented you holy in His sight, without blemish, free from accusation. Some might argue, say, "Whoa, that cannot be true of me today. I'm a sinner. Jeremiah tells me that my heart is wicked, that I am a sinful person." Well, you were. Let's come back to the text. What does it say? It says, "Through Christ's body, through death to present you wholly in His sight." "Oh, Pastor, I know when He's going to do it! He's going to present us holy in His sight when we get to Heaven, when we're glorified, so now I am a person positionally saved, justified. Yes, I can -- but surely, I'm not holy, and I'm not without sin, blemish, and I am absolutely not free from accusation. I -- no, no, no, no, that can't be me, because, Pastor, you don't know me!" No, I do know you. And more importantly, I know the scriptures.

Can God reside with unholiness? Can God be in the presence of unholiness? No, the scripture says He can't. So, deduction -- if God is in you, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you, if Christ lives in you, what must be true of you? You're holy. Without blemish. Free from accusation. "How can that be, Pastor? I still say" -- oh yes, Galatians 2:20 is your answer. Write it down, nail it down. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh" -- it is not yet redeemed; still likes ice cream, Doritos, and a few other things that shouldn't be eaten. "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith." But my friends, this is important. This carcass has not been redeemed. It will one day be redeemed. But you know what is redeemed? My heart, my soul. And yours is, too. What does God do with His enemies? He transforms them. What does God do with His enemies? He gives them His righteousness. What does God do with His enemies? He makes them holy in His sight, without blemish, free from accusation. Who's going to give them an accusation? Well, the body of Christ sometimes gives you an accusation. Satan always wants to give you an accusation. And maybe the tapes in your mind. But what is true of you today? And I could list off a dozen passages of scripture that who you are is a new creation, without blemish, holy, righteous before God, living in a carcass that is unredeemed. Oh, yes. That's what God does with His enemies! And so, Paul says, "We rejoice with our friendship with God. And we rejoice in our calling." Well, what's our calling and how does it happen to do with enemies? Well, it's Paul's writing to people. And he says, "I rejoice that you were once an enemy."

And Paul tells us three things, that if you're going to become a friend of God, that you, like the apostle Paul, will pick up this calling, and you will rejoice in it, even though at times, you look at it, and you think, "Really, I rejoice in this?" Yes. What are they? You must be willing to suffer. So, Paul goes on to say, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you" -- verse 24 -- "and I will rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions." Well, clearly, Paul doesn't add to the atonement of Christ. Paul's not adding because the work of Christ represented by the blood and the body of Christ was insufficient. Oh, no. Paul is just saying that, "I identify with Christ's suffering, and as I do, I fill it up and I suffer on your behalf." What did God do with His enemies? He made them His friends, and then He gives them a calling, to do what? Love more enemies.

We have to be willing to suffer. This is not some baptize masochism. That's not what the text says. But Paul says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I suffer. I suffer for the friends. I suffer for those who are coming to Christ. I suffer for those." Why? Because suffering brings good. How do we know? The cross. How do we know? The bread, the cup. How do we know that suffering brings good? It's because it always has in history -- all the great advancements of God's work around the world has carried with it the suffering of the saints. Missionaries will tell you this all day long. Every field that is opened, every hill that is taken for Christ is done so with the suffering of the body of Christ. Make no mistake, the gospel is never advanced without suffering. Even in Matthew Chapter 11 where Christ is speaking to John the Baptist, and He said, "The kingdom of God is forcefully advancing and forceful men will take hold of it." Why? Why do forceful men have to take hold? Because you're in a battle. Have you ever known a person that goes into battle that doesn't suffer? Have you ever met one? I haven't. Have you ever met a person who goes into battle? Have you ever talked with police officers who go into riots? They suffer. They suffer intensely. By the way, Paul says, "Rejoice, because that's your calling."

One of our -- the pastors of -- you know, all of have probably watched, because he's -- when you write a book and it's sold 42 million copies, people know who he is. I was reading kind of a sketched autobiography of Rick Warren. It was an interview, really, with him. And I knew a number of things beforehand, but I was just kind of taken by the suffering of this dear brother. When he preaches, there's an adrenalin rush that comes out of his body, and he has a certain syndrome that his body reacts, his adrenalin poisons his body. And so, every time he preaches, it takes him a certain number

of days to recover. When he does Easter services, and he does a number of them, he will go home, he will be in bed, turn off the lights, and he's flat until Wednesday. Every year. If that's all that it was, I think probably he could live with that. Maybe one of the greatest sufferings that Rick and his wife encountered was the death -- the suicide -- of their own son. He has suffered. He doesn't regret it. He doesn't regret the suffering, and he doesn't even look at it with anger. He knew that "If I'm gonna take on the gates of Hell, if I'm going to preach and lead God's people, the enemy is not going to just turn away." So Paul says, "It's part of your calling. I rejoice in that I suffer. And I rejoice in that I get to be considered a servant." He goes on, and he says, "The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages, generations, but is now disclosed to the saints -- to that mystery, I am a servant. I've become a servant by the commission of God." One of my favorite quotes from a good friend of mine over the years, he goes, "Mark, everyone wants to be a servant until you're treated like one. And then it's not so fun." Everyone wants to pick up the towel until you're dismissed as a nobody, and you're just treated as a has-been, a servant. But that's your calling. Success in life is not the privilege in the kingdom of God, it's service. That's what Jesus said. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, become what? A servant. Not a power broker. Not a person who's given a lot of authority, but a person who can take their position and their privilege and their resource and become a servant.

Dave Thomas is a man I like to read about. I shouldn't go to his restaurant, but I like Dave Thomas. He's the founder of Wendy's. They made some ads of Dave Thomas. You can go back and dig these up. They made a number of ads, and they told Dave, "We're gonna make these ads because we want people to understand who you are." And the ads were of Dave Thomas behind the counter there, serving. And it would not be strange that Dave would walk into one of his restaurants, put on the apron, and go out and begin to serve. Oh, not for five minutes -- for five hours. And he would serve alongside of those whom probably had never met him, and certainly he didn't know their name and wasn't friends, but they picked up on this, and they actually did ads, because Dave understood that one of the things that privilege gives you is not the opportunity to walk away from the menial, the difficult -- but the opportunity to do it with a servant's heart. Paul says, "That's what I've been commissioned to. I rejoice." And by the way, that's what God does with His enemies. He transforms them and He turns them into what? Suffering servants who struggle for the people that they love.

You must be willing to suffer. You must be willing to serve, and Paul says, you must be willing to struggle. Oh, one of my favorite verses -- "We proclaim him," verse 28, "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end, I labor, struggling with all of God's energy which He powerfully works in me. I want you to know," verse one of chapter two, "how much I'm struggling." What does it mean to struggle? Well, in Paul's world, the world that he lived in, one of the ways that he was a servant is he preached. That doesn't mean that you all have to preach, but the concept of struggling he bears out. It has two aspects -- I admonish and I teach. Well, what does it mean to admonish? It's to take God's word and to take it and personally correct, train, rebuke a person that they might walk with Christ. Teaching -- I'll be honest with you, friends. It takes a gifting to teach. But you can be a coward and be a really good teacher. But to admonish -- to take the word of God and to teach it, and to apply it personally, and to struggle for and to contend for. Oh, if you teach the word of God, you're going to have to have -- probably can't be a coward. You have to teach the word of God, and sometimes it does its own rebuking, but Paul here takes teaching, and he puts it together with admonishment, and he says, "I will do that on your behalf." What does it look like? Well, remember the time where Paul walked into a dinner meeting with Peter? Peter had been enlightened by God, but his fear of losing his Jewish friends made Peter turn into a racist. And he was not having anything to do with the Gentiles, and he was shunning them, and he was being drug back into this Judaism and he was looking down upon the Gentiles. And Paul walks into the dinner, and he looks at Peter, and he says, "Peter, who

has bewitched you? Who has given you a different gospel?" That's admonishment. It's not easy. Sometimes when you admonish a person, they may yell at you and say, "Who are you to condemn me? Who are you to pick -- who are you to judge?" Paul says, "We rejoice in our calling." Who's our calling toward? People who were enemies of God. People who are hostile to God. People who hated God. The people whose lives were practiced in their deeds against God.

In a lot of the racial issues, as I'm reading a lot, I came upon this man, Will Campbell. I didn't know of Will prior to a couple of months ago. Will grew up in Mississippi, went to Yale Divinity School. When he finished Yale, he went back, started an organization. Will was one of the few white guys that led the Nine in their march in Arkansas. He was about civil rights. Will had a passion for civil rights. He believed it represented God. He believed that God died for the world, and he wanted everyone to know that God looks at all people equally. Oh, Will was radical, my friends. So radical that, as Fleming Rutledge tells the story, he said Will attended the trial of Sam Bowers. If you've read in this area, you know who Sam is. He's the Grand Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Bowers is believed to have ordered several killings. It was at the trial that Will Campbell was there. The large Dahmer family sat on one side of the courtroom, Sam Bowers sat alone on the other side. Sam sat alone. No one was with him. And as the trial proceeded, Will at times could be seen sitting with the Dahmers, and other times, he went and sat behind Bowers. A baffled reporter one time went up to him, and said, "Brother Will, why on earth would you sit behind a man who has murdered, who has ordered the murder of black people? Why would you do that? Do you not know that those who have picketed with you and marched with you are questioning whether or not you're with them? Why would you do that?" And Will turned around, and he said, "Because I'm a blank Christian. That's why." See, in Will there's no tribalism. Why? He tells you. "I've identified with liberal sophistication, but I something of lost the grace of God when I did. I understand that those who are in social activism question, but when you come to understand the nature of tragedy, and the One who understands the nature of tragedy, and grace, how it redeems it, then you can never choose sides."

What does God do with His enemies? He transforms them. He makes them holy. He makes them righteous, without blemish, free from accusation. But He forever changes them. They no longer can take the side of tribalism, not if they're true followers of Christ. Oh, no -- when you have become a friend of God, you don't take sides. You seek to make all enemies God's friend. You seek to make all enemies friends of the One Who changed you. When you have faced the true tragedy of your own hostility towards God, and you have experienced the grace of His hand, and the glory of His redemption, my friends, tribalism is not an option for you. You can't choose sides, because you understand the nature of grace. And you rejoice -- you rejoice that God has commissioned you to suffer, to serve, and to struggle for the hearts of all people. That includes people today who are enemies of God. We can't choose sides. Not if you understand the nature of tragedy and your own personal hostility towards God. And when you do, you will struggle. Not against them -- for them, that they might become a friend of God.

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