

Matthew 7:15-20

Colossians 1:1-14

November 18, 2018

The Sacrament of Baptism

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, North Carolina

**STEP UP. STEP OUT.
WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD**

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Dr. Phil, a minister of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in the Wallace Presbyterian Church.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

As you get ready to celebrate Thanksgiving on Thursday, I thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for I have seen for myself your faith in Christ and the love that you have for all the saints.

I know it's not always easy to hold the two together – faith in God and love for your neighbor. Sometimes the circumstances of your lives may tempt you to wonder “Where is God?” Sometimes the people in your lives or church or community or world make you shake your head and ask, “Lord, you want me to love **them?**”

But I want to remind you of something you already know – your faith in God and your love for your neighbors don't depend on your own best efforts or your altruism or your inherent goodness. If they did, we'd all be in trouble, wouldn't we? No, I want you always to remember that your faith in God and your love for your neighbors have to rest on the everlasting hope we have, a hope that is laid up for us in heaven.

But don't go thinking that means your faith in God means knowing all of the creeds of the church by heart or being a theological expert or earning perfect attendance pins for Sunday School. Don't get me wrong – there's nothing wrong with any of those pursuits! But that's not what I mean by “faith in God.”

Faith in God means trusting in God and in God's promises. And that trust in God's promises ought to – and I've seen it lived out so many times among you – lead to love for all of the saints. Think of it this way: the vertical love between you and God leads to a horizontal love between you and your neighbor. There's no separating one from the other. Think about the Ten Commandments – that's the pattern they follow. Think about James' letter, when he says, “What good does it do if you have faith but you don't act on it to help your neighbor in need?” Think about what the faithful apostle John said so many years ago, “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” Remember Jesus' new commandment, “that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” And what about the greatest commandment? “Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.” It doesn't stand alone, for there is another like it. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Do you remember how you came to know God, how you learned of the hope that is stored up for you? Take a minute to remember the beloved fellow servants and faithful ministers of Christ who have shared the gospel truth in your life – your parents, a youth group advisor, your spouse, a pastor, the elders in your church, a good friend, a fellow church member. Remember them and give thanks for their witness in your lives. Even more than that, if you can, tell that person what a difference he or she has made in your life. You know, we don't thank people often enough for the positive influences in our lives. My guess is, when you thank a beloved fellow servant who has made a difference in your life, that will encourage him or her in the faith and you will be strengthened in your own faith and love.

And know this – they let me know about *your* love in the Spirit. Of course, I also have the privilege of seeing your love for God's people firsthand, in this church, in our town, and in far off places.

For that reason, brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope and pray that you will hope and pray to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. I know, I know, that can be awfully hard to do. How do you know if you're seeking and following God's will and not just your own personal desires? How can we know if we're seeking and following God's will as a church?

I think it has a lot to do with the kind of lives you lead or, as Paul wrote to his Christian brothers and sisters in Colossae, "to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God."

Did you know that one of our foundational spiritual guidelines as Presbyterians is that "truth is in order to goodness"? In other words, we believe "that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty." That's what Jesus meant when he said, "You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." (Matthew 7:16-17)

I know I'm repeating myself here, but it's worth saying again, your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints can't be separated – and they both rest on the hope laid up for you in heaven. Wait a minute – FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE! You've heard those words before, haven't you? And the greatest of these is love . . .

So I encourage you to walk worthy of the Lord, knowing that you don't walk alone. God walks with you, your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ walk with you. My prayer is that you will remember that you are not alone – certainly so you will be comforted by that thought, but also so you will realize that all of you are needed in this walk of faith as we seek to trust God and love all of the saints.

My prayer for all of you, then, is the same as Paul's prayer for his Christian brothers and sisters in Colossae, that you may be "made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and you may be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." That's what it says in my Bible. Maybe it would help you to hear it from The Message (by the way, in case you haven't heard the sad news, Rev. Eugene Peterson, the faithful minister of Christ who brought us The Message, died recently): "As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn

how to do *your* work. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul – not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.”

I know you're facing some hard times right now. I see it in your faces, I hear it in your voices. Some of you really are just trying to find the strength to grit your teeth and get through. That's why it's so important for the rest of you to walk worthy of the Lord, to put your trust in Christ Jesus, and let your trust spill over in love for all the saints. And, you know as well as I, that the struggles aren't just here in Wallace and aren't just because of Hurricane Florence. The problems and challenges may seem insurmountable, but in the midst of the storm, we hear Jesus call to us again and again, “Walk this way!”

As you sit down for your Thanksgiving meal on Thursday, I'm sure you will thank God for family and friends and health and the many physical blessings in your lives. That may be harder for some of you to do this year than for others. But, friends, as you give thanks to God on Thursday, don't forget to thank God because “he has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

That language should sound familiar to you – at least the ideas expressed – because you have just celebrated the Sacrament of Baptism with little Callie Jane Cottle. I hope and pray that you took the opportunity to renew your own baptismal vows as you celebrated with Callie Jane and her family. After all, you **are** her family, and you have promised to help Bradley and Kristin teach Callie Jane what it means to trust God and have love for all of the saints. Actually, you promised to *show* Callie Jane what it means to “walk worthy of the Lord,” when you said “We do” after Elder Nell asked, “Will we endeavor by our example and fellowship to strengthen her family ties with the household of God?” Keep your promise to Callie Jane, and to all of the children and youth of our church, and to all of your fellow servants and co-workers. It's really important – but you already know that. I just wanted to remind you and encourage you.

Well, it's about time for me to wrap up this letter to you. Let me recap what I've said:

- I thank God for your faith in Christ Jesus and for the love you have for all the saints.
- I encourage you to hold on to the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, but don't think that means your Christian faith is some kind of other-worldly, pie in the sky, individualistic experience. Faith in Christ Jesus leads to love for your neighbors. And if you're wondering what that kind of love looks like, just remember how God showed his love for you – he *did* something for you when he sent his beloved Son, in whom you have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Wow! That really makes you stop and think about Jesus' new commandment that you love one another, even as he has loved you.
- I encourage you to hang in there, but not with a “barely hanging on by your fingertips” kind of attitude. I know life is hard. I know the challenges are

great. But in the midst of all of those challenges, God calls us to step up and step out – in faith, in love, with generosity, with the strength that comes from his glorious power.

We say stewardship is not fundraising or meeting an annual budget, and I believe that with all of my heart. I hope you do, too. Bill, Harriet, and Mary Laine have shared powerful testimonies with you during worship, about the inseparable connection between our faith in Christ Jesus and our love for all the saints. But, because we live in a physical world and God calls us to be faithful mission co-workers in that physical world, it's true that we need the physical gift of money in the church as we seek to know and do God's will through the missions and ministries of Wallace Presbyterian Church.

For this reason, I encourage you to consider your financial support of our ministry from the perspective of thanksgiving, joy, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of God. That's what I try to do in my own giving.

Beyond that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I encourage you to Step Up and Step Out in thanksgiving and service, not just on the fourth Thursday of November, but every day. I encourage you to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

I, Dr. Phil, wrote this greeting with my own hand. Remember – God loves you and so do I!

Grace be with you.

Let us pray: Our hope is in you, Lord, our hearts belong to heaven. Our hope comes from the gospel, the word of the truth that you brought to us. May it bear abundant fruit in our lives.

Let the whole world be filled with your hope! As we grow in faith, help us truly comprehend your grace, O God; help us understand this amazing grace, as we seek to lead lives worthy of you, O Lord. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.