

"Encourage"
Shepherding Series 3/8
July 14, 2013

Colossians 2:1-23

1 For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. 2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 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. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. 16 Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. 17 These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God. 20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"? 22 All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence. (NRSV)

Today marks the third week of our Shepherding series. We have talked about Showing Up, Hearing Them, and today we are to the letter 'E' and are focusing on Encouragement.

I was truly blessed to spend this past week at Christmount for Camp. If you have never been to camp, or on a special retreat with others who believe in God as you do I fully recommend it. Whether camper, counselor, director, or even the staff, camp touches you and shapes you and reframes your paradigm of how faith impacts our lives both during the week and for ever.

This past week was a unique week for me. Let me show you my new tee-shirt. It says "I survived Sex Camp." And boy did I! I spent and survived as this wonderful tee says the week with a bunch of soon to be 9th graders in what is known as Eighter's camp. The program presented during this week is Created to Be Me and is sponsored by CLER Ministries. While I have done a variety of camps before as a counselor this week was my first spent with just the one age group. If it has been a while please remember how uniquely wonderful the teenage years can be. The teenage years are filled with so many changes both to our bodies and to our lives and those changes are what we learned this past week at Created to Be Me or more commonly referred to as Sex Camp. The kids and adults all learned about themselves and how wonderfully we are made and we also learned every day how to encourage one another to be faithful to who we are in light of God because we are beautiful as God's creation.

We are beautifully created to be us unique and wonderful and complicated and so simply God's. Yet in spite of how fearfully and wonderfully made we are the world tells us differently. The world tells us we are not good enough, tall

enough, short enough, small enough , large enough, smart enough, dumb enough, cute enough, happy enough, sad enough, we smile too much, we laugh too much, we are too Christian for the world and that constant refrain in our ears causes us to eventually break down and believe it.

We begin to believe that we share too much of our faith so we say nothing, we begin to believe that because we do not see God and others who do not know God do not see God that God is not around, present in our lives. We begin to believe what the world tells us to believe instead of what we know to be true.

Encouragement is tricky however. Too often encouragement can fall on the slippery slope and become nagging. Too often we say something positive and follow it with a but...you do this so well but...you are so happy but...you are such a good Christian but... We forget to leave encouragement as encouragement and try to improve upon what is already good and wonderful.

So our scripture today calls us to be united in encouraging one another because we are Christians. That is a struggle is it not? We have so much to do as Christians that we forget that there is great power in positive encouragement amongst ourselves.

This scripture calls attention to Jesus as the servant of the Disciples. One of the greatest instances of Jesus' servanthood was when he washed the Disciples feet. Found in the Gospel of John Chapter 13: 1-17, Jesus washed his Disciples feet. Because even though the body was clean the feet still got dirty. John's Gospel and this scripture in Philippians remind us so much of how Jesus was continually encouraging the Disciples to be the best that he knew them to be. They were made clean through baptism but as they walked among the world and all its crazy their feet still got caught in the muck. So Jesus encouraged them in their faith and witness by washing their feet reminding them that a clean person lay underneath it all.

And that is the crux of it, Jesus saw in his Disciples a very different person than they saw themselves to be. He encouraged their potential. He saw them as they could be and often were without realizing it. That is what we ourselves do is it not? We see others so differently than they seem themselves. I gave the kids the example of the Dove commercial, if you have not seen it I am sure it is on you tube or dove.com but in the add women described themselves to a crime scene artist who could not see them. Then another woman was asked to describe the first and then the two sketches were put up next to one another and there was a drastic difference. The women describing themselves were so negative compared to the other sketch.

It is so disheartening to think that we are so negative about ourselves. This is why encouragement is so very important. It is a continual reminder for each of us to live out the life we are called and created to be.

As a part of this past week to close the week out we as the small group leaders washed our group member's feet. We washed their feet in the stream at Christmount and as we washed their feet we told them what we saw in them as they had been this week. I told one boy he was a leader because all week he had kept our group together and focused, he really had been a leader. He came up to me afterward with tears in his eyes because no one had ever encouraged him to believe it about himself, no one had ever seen him as a leader and told him that.

Encouragement is more than a compliment on what we are already doing, it is an acknowledgement of what we see in another in their service to the Lord.