

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“RALLY DAY”

“We Are the Program”

Colossians 1:9-14

Today (tomorrow) is “Rally Day” here at First Good Shepherd Lutheran Church – a day in which the members and friends of this congregation come together to celebrate the centrality of the reading, studying, discussing, and applying of God’s Word as we live out our lives and ministries together.

In an article entitled, “Administration of the Religious Education Program”, Allen W. Graves said something quite interesting. He said “a church doesn’t have an educational program, rather it is the educational program.” And so it is for us as well. We really don’t just “have” a program in which we may or may not be involved, we, the members and friends of this congregation “are” the program. The real question is, “what kind of program are we?”

God made us that program when He made us members of His Son’s kingdom through water and the Word in Holy Baptism and came to live in us through the power of His Holy Spirit. And in that kingdom He strengthens us in that Spirit through Word and Sacrament to live out our lives with endurance, patience, and joy. As we are filled more and more with the presence of God and the knowledge of His will, we are able to lead a life that bears fruit in every good work, especially in helping others grow in their knowledge of God as well.

Here’s what St. Paul says about that in Colossians 1: 9-14, “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 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. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in who we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” In all of this, Paul calls for the Christians in Colossae, and for us Christians here in Las Vegas as well, to be active in the process wherein we all would be educated and, in turn, to educate each other for wider service to Christ.

It all began, as Paul says, with God rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and bringing us into the Kingdom of His dear Son. It’s not that we chose Him but rather that He chose us. Apart from God’s choosing no one is capable of understanding the will of God. So also, you and I have been brought into God’s kingdom, rescued from the dominion of darkness, and chosen by Him to know and to do His will. And that will is to learn, teach and live out the Good News of forgiveness, life and salvation in Christ.

Within His kingdom, we are nurtured by God's Word, Law and Gospel, in order that we may, in turn, teach others in Christ's name. And when we do, we are built up in our faith toward God and in our love for one another. God strengthens each and every one of us for that great work with His Spirit. In our congregation we teach and learn from one another about God, about the Bible, the world, ourselves, and our relationship with others. We help teachers teach and learners learn. We tell each other Bible stories and we encourage each other to remember and imitate the people of faith from both the Old and New Testaments. But more than that, we teach and learn so that we may grow as Christ's disciples – together.

As we are filled more and more with the knowledge of God and His will that only comes through His Word, we are able more and more as disciples to live a life that bears fruit in every good work especially in helping others increase in the knowledge of God. Paul shares his educational goal with us in that Colossians passage when he says that it's – “to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” You see, maturity in the faith was Paul's primary concern. He desired that every Christian be brought by the Spirit to the mature knowledge of God. Such knowledge is not just attaining measurable bits of information about God or His work, it's the process by which those who live in a trusting relationship with God grow in that relationship, and, in that, reflect Him more and more in their lives of service in His name.

Our own LC-MS once stated in a series of education affirmations, “Christian education is a lifelong process. Spiritual growth is both necessary and possible at all age levels. A formal program of Christian education provides positive influence for Christian training and learning. We affirm that in the process every member of the church must be both teacher and learner.”

And as we said earlier, in our congregation we don't just “have” an educational program, we “are” the educational program. As God made us a part of that program when He brought us into His Son's kingdom, so also He stands ready again today to empower us to recommit ourselves to being strengthened by His Word so that we may mature in the knowledge of God and His will and live a life that is worthy of the Lord and, in that, to become all that He made us to be in our baptism.

There are a number of educational opportunities for that to happen in the lives of our children, our youth, and our adults here at First Good Shepherd this fall. One need only check it out in this month's newsletter or on the poster in the narthex or in our bulletin to find many of them.

It's my hope and prayer that every member of this congregation, as well as every friend, will take God's Word seriously enough to take advantage of at least one of these opportunities and, in that, to take an active part in being the educational program here at First Good Shepherd. May God not only grant this but may He bless us all through His Word in this coming year of the study of that Word for the sake of Jesus who is the Word Incarnate. Amen.