

**Sermon for July 10, 2016 (Proper 10, Year C)**  
**Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary**

Texts: Colossians 1:1-14; Psalm 25:1-9; Luke 10:25-37

Title: He Has Rescued Us

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself...Do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:27-28).

My friends: how do we keep a fire of love for God burning in our hearts all the time? To explore that idea, we are actually going to look more closely at our first reading this morning.

So, to begin, let me ask you: what do you know about this brief Letter to the Colossians? We’re going to be reading through it over the next few weeks.

To start, let’s check our geography.

Colossae was a town in the Roman province called Asia Minor, the land today called Turkey. It was on an important east-west road through the interior. It used to be important, but by the first century Colossae was overshadowed by the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Sadly, we know nothing about the church there. Around the year 63, Colossae was greatly destroyed by an earthquake. It was not rebuilt for a long time, and it has never been excavated by archeologists.

And, we do not even know who actually wrote this letter!

Yes, the very first word of this letter – both in the Greek and in the English – is “Paul”, so the authorship would seem to be quite straightforward.

But there are many good arguments made by skeptical scholars.

And, after all, it was standard practice in those days to write something in the spirit of a great person, carrying their words and their teachings, and to ascribe it to that great person.

So if it was not Paul's hand which wrote this text, then it could have been Timothy or someone else who learned directly from Paul himself.

I confess that I am personally unconvinced by the arguments against Paul's authorship, so I will refer to Paul conventionally as the author.

But, no matter who actually put pen to paper that very first time, what matters now is the text that we have received and that we have to deal with.

And – OH! – what a text it is!

These are words of deep mystical insight which seem to spill and tumble over one another in phrase after phrase of profound beauty.

All of these layers of carefully chosen words are built on the foundation of the last sentence:

“He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

My friends, think on this: what does it mean to be rescued?

Our famous parable from Luke's Gospel carries a similar message, with an unlikely candidate as a rescuer, a surprise hero who shows mercy for the traveler beaten up along the road.

Two weeks ago, there was another unlikely hero in an unheralded, little noticed episode that took place down on Long Island in New York.

Tom Surdyke was a cadet at West Point who had just finished his first year. His 19<sup>th</sup> birthday arrived on Independence Day, but no one celebrated it this year.

On June 28, Cadet Surdyke was on a short break between air assault training and cadet field training – both on the West Point grounds. So he and other cadets went to Cooper's Beach in Southampton, on Long Island. On the beach, they met some girls. All of this sounds like a great summer day, until they went swimming in the ocean.

Cadet Surdyke and one of the girls were pulled out to sea by a strong ripcurrent.

It seems that she was struggling to stay above water, so Surdyke pushed her up and held her up until a bystander on a paddle board came and pulled her out of the water, possibly saving her life.

But by this point, Cadet Surdyke was overcome with exhaustion. He went under. In a few minutes, others in the water were able to pull him out onto the beach and he was rushed to the hospital. But his body was unable to recover. He died a few days later in Stony Brook Hospital.

Cadet Surdyke sacrificed his life to rescue someone else.  
She is fine now, but – listen. Put yourself in her shoes for a moment.  
What does it feel like to be rescued in that way?

By an incredibly bright and promising young man? An Eagle Scout, a West Point cadet, just about to reach his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, everyone was so proud of him – and he gave his life, he literally held her up, so that she could live.

There will be some survivor's guilt that this young woman will have to work through, but I am willing to guarantee you that her life will never be the same.  
That the value which she places upon her own life today is vastly different than it was just a few weeks ago.  
I promise you that NOW she perceives her life as a more precious treasure than she did before she was rescued by the sacrifice of Cadet Tom Surdyke.

This is what I want you to do: can you capture that feeling? Can you imagine it – just a taste of it – within you right now? See if you can grab an imaginary sample of how this young girl feels right now, put it in a bottle and hold onto it!

THIS is exactly what Paul is aiming for in this letter to the Colossians. You can feel this emotion dripping out of this text.

And it grows out of this deep awareness: WE have been rescued!

You have been rescued! Don't try to argue with the fact. Just, for once, try to accept it as a fact of your existence which is more real than the rain falling from the sky.

YOU have been rescued! And it cost him his life.

YOU are the traveler on the road to Jericho, stripped and beaten and left for dead. Christ treated your wounds, picked you up and took care of you.

I'll bet you that the young woman who was rescued by Cadet Surdyke is likely – from now on – to lead a life worthy of his sacrifice.

You and I are called to lead lives worthy of the Lord, worthy of HIS sacrifice. In a very real sense, the entire exercise of our Christian lives – day after day, year after year – is intended to keep alive that feeling of being rescued, to tend that flame of love in our hearts so that it never, ever goes out.

There are more tools within the Church's toolbox designed to keep this feeling alive than you and I will ever know.

But one of these old tools from our Anglican tradition is called The Exhortation and it is found on page 316 in the Book of Common Prayer.

Please pick up a book. I want to show it to you.

Like the Letter to the Colossians, this text is drenched with emotion.

Please, let me read it to you now as you listen and try to soak up a bit of the feeling conveyed by these words.

***Beloved in the Lord: Our Savior Christ, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood as a sign and pledge of his love, for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of his death, and for a spiritual sharing in his risen life. For in these holy Mysteries we are made one with Christ, and Christ with us; we are made one body in him, and members one of another.***

***Having in mind, therefore, his great love for us, and in obedience to his command, his Church renders to Almighty God our heavenly Father never-ending thanks for the creation of the world, for his continual providence over us, for his love for all mankind, and for the redemption of the world by our Savior Christ, who took upon himself our flesh, and humbled himself even to death on the cross, that he might make us the children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, and exalt us to everlasting life.***

***But if we are to share rightly in the celebration of those holy Mysteries, and be nourished by that spiritual Food, we must remember the dignity of that holy***

***Sacrament. I therefore call upon you to consider how Saint Paul exhorts all persons to prepare themselves carefully before eating of that Bread and drinking of that Cup.***

***For, as the benefit is great, if with penitent hearts and living faith we receive the holy Sacrament, so is the danger great, if we receive it improperly, not recognizing the Lord's Body. Judge yourselves, therefore, lest you be judged by the Lord.***

***Examine your lives and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, that you may perceive wherein you have offended in what you have done or left undone, whether in thought, word, or deed. And acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly Food.***

***And if, in your preparation, you need help and counsel, then go and open your grief to a discreet and understanding priest, and confess your sins, that you may receive the benefit of absolution, and spiritual counsel and advice; to the removal of scruple and doubt, the assurance of pardon, and the strengthening of your faith.***

***To Christ our Lord, who loves us, and washed us in his own blood, and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory in the Church evermore. Through him, let us offer continually the sacrifice of praise, which is our bounden duty and service, and with faith in him, come boldly before the throne of grace.***

To Christ our Lord who loves us and washed us in his own blood.

My friends: I have been loved and washed. I have been rescued.

Can you say that with me right now? I HAVE BEEN RESCUED.

Yes! Say it to your heart every single day. We have been rescued.

Now, it is our turn to lead lives worthy of the Lord and worthy of his sacrifice. Amen.