

First Presbyterian Church
Phil. 3:4b-14, “Found in Christ”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 10/4/2020

Where are we today?

I mean, I’m here, obviously, and you’re there,
but ... where is here, and there, and what day is it today?
Because I’m recording this on Saturday, Oct. 3rd,
and you’re watching it on ... some other day.
So on the day you’re watching it, you’re still there,
but I’m no longer here.
You could almost say this whole discussion
is neither here nor there!

One way of knowing where you are is having a reference point,
a marker of home, a center that you are based out of.
That’s what the address on our envelopes function as—
they are a steady reference for our location,
how to get to where we are from somewhere else.

The Apostle Paul knows where he is in the world.
And the reason is that he has placed an enduring marker
at the center of his world: knowing Christ.

Every other identifying marker he considers to be...garbage.
(Which I have been told is an extremely polite way of translating
that Greek word in verse 8.)

He had previously centered his world on the basis of his reputation,
his status, his accomplishments, his cultural lineage, his zeal.

Peel back the layers of Paul's world when he was
a Pharisee called Saul of Tarsus,
and all the reference points Paul used were focused
on things that were within human control,
even while making many references to God.
But now he seeks to center his world on something
completely out of his control: Christ Jesus.

This does not mean that the surface of every interaction
has the name Jesus in it—
that every conversation is about Jesus,
that you need to wear evangelistic clothing,
that you must call out, "Praise the Lord,"
whenever you find a good parking spot.
Basing our relationships on Christ means that, more fundamentally,
the knowledge of Christ is informing and transforming
who we are in each moment.

As I already mentioned, he says that everything he once considered
an asset he now considers to be loss.

This is, of course, accounting language.

What shows up as a positive in the balance sheet of Paul's life?

Then he steps up the rhetoric again and says,

**"I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth
of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,
for whose sake I have lost all things."**

That last phrase is key for us.

When you go hiking with kids,
you always think about what happens if they get lost.
The most common answer is: Hug a tree.
Why hug a tree? Because they won't wander around
into unexpected places, or loop in behind where you're looking,
or get into an even worse situation than they're already in.
If you're the kid and nobody has come for an hour or two,
you can imagine how tempting it is to find new location,
new center, maybe get to the top of the hill!
But if you're trying to find the kid,
you want them to stay close to the trail right under the tree.
You want them to let go of all those other possibilities,
to reject them.

When Paul says, "I have lost all things."
he means that every other landmark
or gathering location has been rejected:
He's hugging a tree, and the tree is Christ!

This means he has even rejected
his friendship with the Philippian church,
his personal authority, his training in the Scriptures,
everything has been discarded as worthless as a centering location.

Obviously, "losing" those things doesn't mean they cease to exist.

But it does mean that compared to Christ,
they exist at a much less fundamental level.
They are no longer the most basic pieces
of the world that Paul builds.

So think about someone who is important to you: a family member,
a trusted friend.

If the knowledge of Christ is going to be at the center
of that relationship, or any relationship,
then we have to “reject it” for the sake of Christ.

We, like Paul have to lose all things in order to gain Christ,
which then moves us into a new foundation upon
which we build our world.

Every other foundation, every other ambition, every political affiliation,
every half-acknowledged motive has to be relinquished
so that we can truly know Christ.

Now let’s move to another question.

What is Paul’s *goal* in knowing Christ?

He says in verses 8 and 9 his goal is
“that I may gain Christ *and be found in him.*”

So that he can both gain and be found in Christ.

Being found is the language of *location*.

Where can you be found? Where in the world are you?

Paul can answer that question: He’s found in Christ.

It’s a great place to be!

Now we see the brilliance of this whole approach:

Paul has so ordered his world

that some very unusual phenomena can take place.

He can be in prison and be found in Christ.

He can be traveling and be found in Christ.

He can write letters to his friends and be found in Christ.

He can go through a pandemic and be found in Christ.

He can live in a world ruled by corruption and injustice
and be found in Christ.

He can even *sin* and be found in Christ, because, as he puts it,

he does not **“have a righteousness of my own
that comes from the law, but that which is through
faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes
from God on the basis of faith.”**

Even Paul’s sinful self is found in Christ,

because if he were found anywhere else he would be without hope.

Because he has built his world around the person of Jesus,
he has access to a righteousness that surpasses
his own and is abounding in grace,
which washes him clean and gives him
a new status before God.

But here’s the catch: it’s only possible to be found in Christ
everywhere you go if you’ve already lost the whole world
for the sake of Christ.

As if we hadn’t gotten the point yet, he says it again in verse 10,
“I want to know Christ.” Not just in some abstract sense,
this is not merely some kind of *spiritual feeling* that he has.

Paul wants to know Christ in the real world—to know, he writes,

**“the power of his resurrection
and participation in his sufferings.”**

To know power is to *take action* in your world.

To participate in suffering is to have the real experience
of self-emptying and persecution that Jesus had.

As someone who is found in Christ,

Paul wants the whole deal—not just a piece, not just a taste—
he wants the power *and the agony* of life with Christ.

He wants to become like him in his death,

and so, somehow, attain to the resurrection of the dead.

That is stripping everything down
to a fundamental building block. Knowing Christ.

Every single thing in Paul's life was aimed at knowing Christ.

That's what he was about, that's where he could be found.

When we look to Jesus in faith, we also gain him
and are found in him.

And sometimes I act like that's really true!

But other times I'm just too exhausted, too weak,
too distracted, in too much pain.

I can't constantly be stripping off the layers of my world,

examining everything and everyone around me

to make sure that Christ is at the core of it.

Who has the energy to do that all the time?

For those of you who would answer like that,

we get a chance to relate to Paul a bit in verse 12

when he assures us,

“Not that I have already obtained all this,
or have already arrived at my goal.”

That’s a relief, isn’t it? Because I know that
when I peel back the layers on my marriage and my friendships,
my ministry and my motivations,
there’s still a decent bit of selfish ambition in there.
But even though I’m not a finished product,
I know for certain that Christ is at the center.

Paul says that’s true for him, too.
And so he presses on towards that goal.

Only one thing can remain at the deepest level.
If we build our communal life around knowing Christ
and being found in Christ
then we can re-engage all the beloved-but-rejected
areas in new and more beneficial ways.

We can re-engage ministry and service with each other.
We can weather the unexpected storms that crop up
because our world has been deconstructed
and reconstructed with the knowledge of Christ
as our North Star.

So ... Where are you found today?