

Sermon Text for April 28, 2024

By Guest Minister – Rev. Doug Friant

SEE TO IT

Deu 8:12-18,

- ¹² When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them,
¹³ and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied,
¹⁴ **then do not exalt yourself**, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,
¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock,
¹⁶ and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.
¹⁷ **Do not say to yourself**, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. (Deu 8:12-18 NRS)

Col 2:6-10

- 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.

See to it....

See to it. That is- make sure- it gets done. As in – Pay attention- don't forget. Insist- be certain

See to it. It is a priority. Be careful. See to it. First things first. Follow- through See to it...

The writer of Colossians says- See to it that no one takes you captive.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit.

That is something of a strange statement. See to it- that no one takes you captive

Not something we usually say- not something we worry about-

That sounds a little like something that parents or grandparents might say to college kids before they go off to spring break- don't get kidnapped....

See to it that no one drugs you or sells your kidneys. Be careful – don't get robbed...

The Greek word in Colossians is pretty broad. It can be to be taken captive- or carried off as plunder or robbed, preyed upon or even figuratively as brainwashed or misled.

None of that is very good so...

Be careful

See to it. That no one takes you captive.

This morning we are going to listen for God's word to us through this short strange reading in the book of Colossians. We will try to understand and heed its word of WARNING so that we are careful- and avoid being kidnapped. See to it....

Chapter 2 starts off.. Paul is saying that his prayer or hope for these people- for whom he is struggling- is that they have all the **riches** of assured understanding- have Christ- who is the hidden **treasure** of wisdom and knowledge of God. And that he rejoices over the **firmness** of their faith

The word- firmness- is really the same word as firmament- ground. So it makes sense a few verses later- when we get to our reading for today- and Paul says

**As you therefore have received Christ Jesus.., continue to live your lives in him,
7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught**

The church here has received A teaching that has brought- them riches of assured understanding and all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Paul is saying this rootedness in Jesus- this firm faith- has brought treasures and riches-

And we are abounding in Thanksgiving

Abounding- the Greek word means- be extremely rich- have an abundance- surplus- more than enough- be overflowing

We who are rooted in Christ- are overflowing with an abundance of thanksgiving because of the riches understanding and precious wisdom we have received.

So see to it..

See to it- that no one takes you captive- we are to be careful that no one robs us—no one carries us off in plunder or brainwashes us through philosophy and empty deceit- according to human tradition..

We who rooted in Christ- have such riches and treasures- such abundance—that we are in danger- of being kidnapped- taken captive and ransomed-

So see to it—that no one takes you captive by the empty deceit **of the elemental spirits of the universe.**

That last bit- is such an interesting expression- elemental spirits of the universe- it only occurs twice in the bible- here and in Galatians- Stokia Tou Cosmou- it's an idiom- an expression that is hard to translate. In classic Greek- it can mean numbers or letters of the alphabet or first principles. Here in the bible- I think it is best translated- elemental powers in the world.

For us we might think of the weather or climate, we might think of the economy or global market place or the laws of physics or science. These things are powerful- and complex- and beyond us as humans. When you think about the biggest powers in our world- climate change, technology, global migration... We can try to guess or predict or analyze- but we certainly can't really control- these powers.

In our reading- this phrase sounds bad- maybe even evil- but in general in Greek- the phrase is neutral and yet the message here is subtle- be careful- **the attitude or philosophy about such things from a human perspective- is dangerous-**

See to it that no one takes you captive through their attitudes about the powers of the world.

Perhaps the easiest example of something like this in our world- is Money.

For the last few years, my life has been flip-flopped. After decades in full-time ministry- I came home to help out the family company. I now- do what most of you do- or did- I work for money and volunteer for the church. I now spend a lot of time thinking about money. I work with audits and taxes and budgets and business plans, I volunteer for the Presbytery as chair of the Admin committee – that's the building and finance committee of the Presbytery- I work with the Presbytery budget and money, and at times - they loan me out to help other churches with money issues.

Money money money

And I have to say- Money is great. Money is greatas a tool for the kingdom of God. I love thinking about how I can use my money for the Kingdom of God ...I love talking to people about the joy of gratitude and the good news of gifts. **It is exciting to think about how the sustaining overflowing love of God has poured into my life and how it pours out- God's grace is like some wonderful breathtakingly beautiful - cascading water fall....**

Money as a tool for the gracious- generous- overflowing- loved filled- Kingdom of God- is GREAT!

But in my unique position straddling work and worship, sacred and secular...I have to say there is whole lot of weirdness around money. **To the church I think Paul would say- see to it- that no one takes you captive by the messed up- mixed up- message of money.**

For example- the church has a long and not so pretty history of promising blessings for cash. Oh we could look back to Johann Tetzel in the 1500's promising as money dropped in the box- so a

soul flies out of purgatory into heaven. That kind of talk – started the Reformation... More recently we could listen to the prosperity gospel which has flourished among independent evangelists in America for the last few decades. Directly and indirectly, they promise that if you give money to the church- God will return your money to you many times over. The message of these preachers is confirmed by their personal lives- once they were poor- now look how prosperous they are. As proof of God's prosperous power- Pastor Creflo Dollar (no I didn't make that name up)- once asked his congregation to help him buy a 65 million dollar Jet.-. That extravagant gift- would be proof of God's extravagant blessing... That's messed up- the earth's is the Lord's and the fullness thereof- each sunrise- each breath is an example of God's extravagant blessing... **See to it ..that no one robs us of abundance of gratitude for God's abundant blessings we all have.**

In the world- we talk about money as a transaction- I give you this- you give me that. But the Bible says God gives- life and breath and all things. If we give gifts for the kingdom of God- is not in exchange for anything- but out of gratitude- for the bounty that has flowed into our hearts and lives. We don't need to – nor can we buy God's blessings.

At the other extreme- There have been other church leaders- who emphasized that we should give up all worldly possessions. **How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God-** they say- Our neighboring town of Ephrata was founded in the 1700's around a cloistered community that sought to shun money and all worldliness.

Those might be extreme examples, but there are certainly times when churches and church leaders have given a **messed up message about money**. Some might say- that the church needs your money.

But The church does not need your money. Does not need my money. **We serve a mighty and infinitely gracious God.** The church does not need money- at least not nearly as much as me and money need the church! It isn't that the church can't exist without money- but money- and stuff is a mess without the church.

See to it- that no one takes you captive-

There is a lot of weirdness about money-going on...

In our secular lives, we talk about someone being a self-made man or woman? I'm not sure that we can point to very many examples- but we seem to have this idea- this dream or fantasy that people can become successful on their own. From a religions point of view- that is just crazy. We are not on our own and people never start from nothing.

The reading from Deut lays that out nicely. Moses is preparing the people for entering the promise land. He tells them the ways and laws of God- and warns them- **when your herds and flocks have multiplied- and your silver and gold is multiplied- and all that you have is multiplied- then do not exalt yourself- forgetting the Lord your God. ... Do not say to yourself,** "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth."

... **Do not say to yourself**, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth."

Oops - of course we say that. All the time – all over the place. We give that message on TV shows like – lifestyles of the rich and famous- or Selling Sunset. We celebrate it with every Tik Tok or Instagram post. We proclaim it- each time with tell the story of some tech genius or bitcoin billionaire.

We sell it- with every add from vitamin shakes to investment bankers- Look what I have done- look what you can do. We have the power- we are great.

... **Do not say to yourself**, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth."

We tend to see wealth as a reflection of success and importance. Rich people- must be better at stuff- and poor people- well- there is something wrong with them.

But the radical acceptance of all people- rich and poor- was one of the amazing things about the early church. All have sinned and fallen short of the **glory of God- and all who are rooted in christ- have riches of assured understanding (Col 2:2 NRS) and the all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:3 NRS) and have a surplus of gratitude.**

We spend billions of dollars a year in advertising to convince people that they/we are needy- we are deficient without_____ a new car- a new kitchen—a new diet- a new ...

The world tells us we are deficient- we don't have enough- But we who are rooted in Christ- have an abundance- have treasure- have riches- we overflow with gratitude and thanksgiving. We have enough.

In our secular lives- we value stuff- more than people- stand your ground- defend your castle. A clear example of how we value stuff above people...some of the lowest wage/ hardest jobs in our country are for childcare workers and nursing home workers- some of the highest wages- are for those who manage our investments

In the world- we say finders keepers- in the bible- if you find a lost animal of a neighbor you must return it- even if they are an enemy.

In the world- money is security- and safety- but our trust is in the Lord- maker of heaven and earth.

And the mixed up messed up- message of money is robbing people. Recently the Wall Street Journal- told the story of the dangerous- controlling- destructive work of Online Gambling. A Netflix documentary- tells the story of how Social Media and Tech companies treat users as a commodity of data to be bought and sold. Their whole business model is about keeping users as addicted as drug addicts.

A lottery winner has to declare bankruptcy because they have spent millions trying to buy

happiness- and have been **robbed of joy- robbed of gratitude- robbed of thanksgiving-** by the
MESSED UP – MIXED UP MESSAGE OF MONEY

So...see to it.

See to it- let us see to it- that no one takes us captive.

The stokia tou cosmou- in the ancient world it was said you must either worship the powers- or the God who rules over the powers. The same is true for us. There are powerful forces in our world. Money is necessary. But contrary to all that we hear- it is not sufficient. Money won't fix the broken parts of our lives, money won't solve the deep social divides of our country, money doesn't bring happiness or security.

See to it- that we are not taken captive and worship the powers instead of the one who gives all good gifts.

For God- so loved the world- God's love could not be contained- but spilled over into our world-
For God so loved the world- he gave his son- Our text says..

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to **fullness** in him

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷
rooted and built up in him **abounding in thanksgiving.**

⁸ See to it