

After The Honeymoon

July 10, 2016

Colossians 1:1-14

Someone defined a honeymoon as “the brief period of time between ‘I do’ and ‘You'd better!’” That captures many marriage experiences. It also captures what is happening in the church at Colossae. The “Jesus honeymoon” is over for the Colossian Christians.

This is the first message in a series on Paul’s letter to the Colossians. The whole series is called “New Life (Continued).” You may wonder about the “continued” part.

The Colossian Christians had a spectacular start in their life with Jesus and with one another. The Good News of Jesus produced exuberant and explosive growth in faith, hope and love. News of this astonishing growth found its way to Paul.

Paul gives thanks for what he hears about the Colossians. “*Just as [the word of the Gospel] is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world,*” Paul writes, “*so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves...*”

The Colossian Christians had an amazing Jesus honeymoon. Now it seems that the honeymoon is over. How do we live the New Life (Continued)? That’s the question Paul answers in this Letter to the Colossians. Here is his answer.

The New Life continues, or it stops being new.

The Colossian Christians want something more. Their first love is no longer enough. Maybe a new set of rules will rekindle the flame. Maybe a new spiritual experience will re-light the fire. Maybe some new philosophy will re-awaken the passion.

But that’s not the problem. The problem is that life continues after the honeymoon. How do they live the New Life (Continued)? It starts with gratitude. Let me use an illustration from the world of marriage counseling.

John Gottman is one of the foremost experts on marital satisfaction and success. I use his *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* as the basis for my premarital counseling. Gottman says the key to sustaining marital satisfaction and success is **thanksgiving**. Marriages continue and flourish to the degree that we are grateful for one another.

Gottman describes an exercise for marital thanksgiving. Take a week, he says, and notice every time you focus on what’s wrong with your partner. Every time that happens, change the focus to something that’s right. The next week, give your partner one genuine, heartfelt compliment each day. Of course, more is better. Notice the difference this makes. Then lather, rinse and repeat...

Paul does the same thing in Colossians. He focuses on gratitude to God for the Good News of Jesus. He spends a whole paragraph being grateful for that Good News in the life of the Colossians.

The New Life continues, or it stops being new.

How do we live the New Life (Continued)? If Paul can go on and on in his thanksgiving for the Colossians, I can match that in my thanksgiving for you.

You are people of great love, great energy and great generosity. I am glad to brag you up wherever I go in our community and our synod. I am honored to be your pastor and to be part of this time in the life of Emanuel.

You have embraced new ways of doing worship and fellowship. You have grappled with issues of worship schedule and focus. You have invited friends and neighbors to events and services. You have worked hard to make things happen here at Emanuel. You have become wonderful partners with our neighborhood and with other congregations.

I have not only heard of your faith in our Lord Jesus, I have seen it in action. I have seen the fruit of that faith in your hope for the future and your love in the present.

The New Life continues, or it stops being new.

When I renew my gratitude for you and for our ministry, I am re-energized for our work together. That's my part. Your part is different.

Paul returns the Colossians to the really Good News of Jesus. Through Jesus, God "*has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" We have been moved from death into life, from darkness into light. We have the strength of Jesus flowing through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Can you give thanks for that?

That thanksgiving is absolutely critical if your new life in Jesus is to continue.

This week, notice every time you focus on what's wrong with your life. Every time that happens, change the focus to something that's right with your life. Every time you do that, say thank you to God. Give Jesus one genuine, heartfelt compliment each day. Of course, more is better. And lots more is much better. Notice the difference this makes. Then lather, rinse and repeat...

The New Life continues, or it stops being new.

Next week we'll spend some time getting reacquainted with who Jesus really is. If you think you're grateful now, just wait a week! We'll talk about the riches of God that belong to us all. Let's pray...

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