

Colossians 4:7-18

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Notice the filial nature of the church. One brother encourages another, and vice versa. Paul is reinvigorated and emboldened in his ministry by his brothers in the ministry. He is not alone in the service of our Lord in the preaching office. No, others know his challenges and burdens. They comfort him. They remind him of God’s goodness, that the gospel has more voices than his alone, and that the church does not rest on his shoulders. Greetings abound—sincere greetings—as this letter ends. Paul passes on greetings and hopes to receive them. The church is a community, a bigger community than we often know, and one part builds up and encourages another, as we rejoice when we hear from a mission on the other side of the globe, and that mission rejoices to find support from brothers in the faith in parts of the world its members might never visit, but delight to hear from.

No one is alone in the church. We are a family. We are a family of faith. When we gather, we do so not only for ourselves, but so that others might be edified through our presence, through our proclamation of the Word in hymn, creed, and prayer, and through our greetings. We are members of the body of which Christ is the Head, one connected to the other and for the other. And so as Paul was encouraged by those who shared his calling to some extent in the preaching office, whether as apostles or pastors, so also those with varied lay vocations are encouraged and comforted by others who know their challenges and burdens, who can understand and speak to their lives with the love of Christ.

Like Old Testament Scripture, this letter was to be read to the Laodiceans, and, similarly, the Colossians were to read the letter to the Laodiceans. That is a reference either to a letter now lost to us or to the Letter to the Ephesians. We see already how churches were sharing apostolic letters and teaching. This is how what we know as the New Testament canon came into being, as churches preserved these letters and shared them, testifying to their legitimate authorship and biblical content. Notice also that this letter was written to be heard by most, as many either could not read or did not have access to a copy of the letter (there was no printing press). So also, we not only read the Scriptures but gather to hear them read to us still today, and then to have them expounded by a called preacher and teacher.

Lord, thank you for preserving this letter of the Apostle Paul, inspired by Your Spirit. Let its teachings take root in our hearts and be put into practice among us. Amen.