



Colossians 1:24-2:5  
Colossians: Mature In Christ  
A New "Somebody Else"

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Watoto Sunday

George Burns once said, "The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible." So, with that, I hope to have a good sermon...and I will keep it brief so we can let the music of Watoto continue to lead us in worship.

I am so glad you're here this morning not only to be inspired and encouraged in your journey of life and faith, but also to bless and encourage Watoto. And this week as I thought about this morning and the ministry of Watoto, and of all of us coming together...and as I thought about that through the lens of this morning's Scripture passage, it occurred to me that there are two extremes that we tend to have in our culture when it comes to our relationship with God and to the Church and in other spheres of life as well...and both extremes are being combated this morning as we join together, and both extremes are addressed by Paul in our passage that we just read.

The first extreme is to presume that somebody else will do what's needed. From doing the laundry or unloading the dishwasher to coaching our kids' sports teams to caring for the less fortunate in our community to ministries of the church, to welcoming a new neighbor to the neighborhood, we tend to hope/presume/pray that someone else will do whatever it is that needs to be done. Sometimes we are genuinely too busy with genuinely good stuff. I get it: between work, marriage, my kids, keeping the house orderly and cars running, my calendar is full. I need the Beatles' Eight Days A Week. And those are all good things – I love being pastor of this church, I love my wife and kids, I really like my house...and I have a love-hate relationship with our two cars depending on whether or not they're working ok that day; lately things haven't been so good! But these are all good things. And sometimes really good things prevent us from doing other really good things. But sometimes we are involved in things that aren't so good or noble and that could be cut out of our lives to make room for good things...or maybe for some of us, we have plenty of time and energy to add more good things, but for no real reason at all – laziness or apathy – we just hope/pray/presume that somebody else will take care of the need.

This week I came across an Obituary that is super-appropriate to this theme. Here's what it says: "Our community was saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our most valued and beloved members, Someone Else.

For many, many years as a part of this community Someone Else did far more than a normal person's share of the work. Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, or a meeting to attend, everybody said, "Let Someone Else do it." Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results as people thought: "Someone Else can work with that group."

It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the most generous givers in our community. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone assumed Someone Else would come through and make up the difference. Now Someone Else is gone! We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things that Someone Else did?" We will all miss "Someone Else"<sup>1</sup> What a great death and obituary! I know in our Protestant tradition we don't usually name "saints"...but maybe we should call this person "Saint Someone Else."

And this is why I'm so glad to look out and see so many saints with real names here this morning because you realized that Someone Else didn't just need to be here, but *you* need to be here. We're all here, in part, to support Watoto – whether you give financially or not, your presence here, your prayers for them, your words of encouragement after the service – these things support them and strengthen them. And then I hope that carries over into *other* facets of life as well – from welcoming someone new into the neighborhood to serving in the church and in the community: These things are not just someone else's responsibility, but ours.

Paul's words in this letter are a strong reminder of the sacrifice it takes to serve others, and that we can't always presume someone else will do the work. He writes, "I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of the

church. I have become its [the church's] servant...To this end I labor, struggling with all his [Christ's] energy...I want you to know how much I am struggling for you...and for all those who have not met me personally” (Colossians 1:24-2:1 selections).

Paul made no assumptions that “Someone Else” would do this work, and when God presented him with the opportunity to serve and sacrifice for others, he stepped out in faith, and kept persevering in spite of what it cost him (he’s in prison for his faith as he writes). And so I hope this encourages us and inspires us to do likewise; to serve those around us so we’d be beacons of light shining for Jesus in the world. So that’s one extreme that we want to combat and that we *are* combating this morning: to presume that somebody else will do whatever it is that needs to be done.

Now, the other extreme is just the opposite, and we are all guilty of this at times as well. And that is when we start thinking, “Only I can do this,” or “I need to do this all on my own.” Occasionally this comes from feeling like we’ve been abandoned by those around us and we simply *have* to do it on our own. For instance, when a spouse feels like they’re the only one pulling their weight in a marriage, and that they need to do everything to keep things running smoothly in the home and in the relationship, that is never a good situation. Maybe some couples here this morning are in that situation, and if so, I hope you’ll have an honest, heart-felt conversation – maybe even this afternoon – and spend a lot of time asking questions, listening to one another, and seeking to understand one another.

But sometimes we are prideful and have an air of superiority and believe that we are the only ones who *can* do whatever it is that needs to be done; that we don’t need other people. The fact is: that is rarely – if ever – the case. We need each other, and we are reminded of that as we join together this morning though our homes are in different parts of the Seattle area or are even on different continents. We can’t do life on our own. We need encouragement and support; we need others to even carry us along at times.

And ironically, the place where maybe people have this attitude the *most* is in regards to the other side of the grave. So many people think, “I’m a good

enough person to spend eternity in heaven. I can do this on my own.” And yet if you pause and think about it logically for a moment: you and I, on our own, have no idea what it takes to dwell in eternity with the Holy Creator of the Universe. I’ll ask for help fixing my car, I’ll ask Siri for help navigating to an address that’s new to me, I’ll ask a waiter what he or she recommends off the menu at a restaurant that’s new to me...but finding my way to peace with God, peace in life, and peace in death in the presence of my Creator? So often we say: I’ve got this. How ironic is that? The one time we actually *need* “somebody else” and we suddenly think we can do it on our own. I don’t know how to get to heaven on my own. None of us do.

And Paul speaks to that in this passage as well, as he does throughout his letters, and it’s all based on Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus taught this very same stuff himself. But in today’s passage, Paul writes, “My purpose [for doing all he can and not presuming someone else will do it] is that people may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” (Colossians 2:2-4).

What he means by “the full riches,” and “complete understanding” and “the mystery of God” and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”...what he is speaking to there is that he wants them to know the truth of Jesus – to know about his life, death, and resurrection...about Jesus’ teachings about God and eternity, and about himself... Paul wants them to *know* all of that...not just intellectually, but to live into it, because we can’t find our way to heaven on our own. We actually need someone else to help us: And Jesus is the one who can do that. And Paul knows all this first-hand, because he tried to do it all on his own until his own life-changing encounter with Jesus. We can’t be good enough on our own. We can’t make our own way to heaven.

And so we see these two extremes in our world and probably in our own lives if we’re honest with ourselves: We presume somebody else will take out the garbage, wash the dishes, mow the grass, feed the hungry, shelter the

homeless, fix the building, teach the children...but when Jesus stands before us and offers to lead us into eternity...when he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”...when he says to us, “Come, follow me...”...so many times *then* we decide that “someone else” isn’t sufficient. That Jesus isn’t enough.

My friends: we have it all backwards.

We need “somebody else” – not just anyone, but Jesus Christ, who actually is sufficient to be that “somebody else” that we need. And in response to his goodness and love, we then are the answer to other people’s cries for needing “somebody else” in their times of need in this world – from mowing the lawn and doing the dishes to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing shelter for the homeless.

So thank you for being here and *not* presuming that someone else would show up to bless and encourage and support Watoto. I hope and pray you are also blessed and encouraged and inspired – so that you might grow in faith, and through you, God might touch the life...of somebody else. Let’s pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/jokes/> (I have amended this slightly for the context of today’s message.)