

Karl Valentin, of Munich, Germany, was one of the best of the rare breed of performing artists that you and I call clowns – though he was also a comedian, an author and movie producer. He was born in Munich in 1882, and died in 1948. There's a particular routine he did that he is especially known for. The stage is darkened, illuminated only by a single circle of light cast on the floor by a street lamp. Valentin, with a deeply concerned and worried expression on his face walks around in this circle of light, looking for something on the ground. A policeman comes onto the scene and asks him, “What have you lost?” “The keys to my house,” says the clown. The policeman then helps him in his search for these lost keys, but they find nothing. After looking for a while, the policeman asks him, “Are you sure that you lost your keys here?” “No,” says the clown. Then he points to a dark corner of the stage, “I lost them over there.” “Then why on earth are you looking for the keys here?” asks the policeman. The clown replies, “Because there is no light over there.”¹

There's a deeper truth in this story that these two characters act out. **It's a story that many of us find ourselves living at different times, because we like to go where the promise of light is.** Many of us are looking for something, and we want to be “in the light” and not “in the dark.” We want to be “in the know,” we want to be on the inside circle, we want to be the recipients of fulfilled promises, we want to be blessed, we want to be in community, we want to be loved, we want a sense of purpose and fulfillment. We're looking for something, and we presume that just because a light is on, that that's where we need to be. But if “all the world's indeed a stage” as Shakespeare penned (and Geddy Lee sang with Rush), sometimes the light leads us to a blank spot on the stage of life, where nothing meaningful actually exists.

Similarly, the church in Colosse experienced a tendency to gravitate toward circles of light that held hollow illuminations. There was a lot of good happening in their church, but Paul was writing for a reason to help them with something, too. It's like they were looking for something, and doing so

in places that were easily illuminated by religious endeavors – probably many of which had been a part of their religious lives before coming to faith in Jesus. But **Paul calls them back to the center, to return to the true light, where life to the full and life eternal can be found: the light of Jesus Christ.**

In this passage, Paul uses metaphors other than light, and he kind of combines them all together. He writes in verses 6 and 7, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Paul uses the metaphor of being rooted in Christ, which is really an agricultural metaphor, and also to be built up in Christ, which is a construction metaphor, and then he also talks about being established in the faith which sounds like some kind of social or community metaphor – like being established in a neighborhood. The point is clear, however: **He's encouraging them to remain strong in their faith and in their relationship with Jesus Christ, holding fast to what they had learned about Him, and not gravitating toward any old “light” – like the clown in the skit – just because it's convenient.**

And there are two ways he highlights here that people who follow Jesus Christ are strengthened in their faith: through knowledge and through action. That's what Paul writes about in verses 8-23 (and beyond). So living our lives in Christ, being rooted and built up and established in him takes its shape through our knowledge of Jesus and through our actions that flow out of that knowledge.

Paul then gives them a warning that we all need to hear and be reminded of occasionally, when he writes: **“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition...and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).** And most of the rest of what we read, through verse 23, continues, and builds upon this theme. Know Christ and live Christ, and resist hollow philosophy; Know Christ and live Christ, and resist empty religious practices; Know Christ and live Christ, and steer clear of religious “have-to's”; Know Christ and live Christ, and don't let others condemn you for not participating in religious

festivals or observations that aren't Christ-honoring. In other words, Jesus Christ is sufficient.

When something has good roots, it's harder for other things to grow in that same place. A grass yard, for example, that has patches without grass, is likely to develop weeds. But if you have a thick lawn with no thin spots or bear spots, the network of roots prevents weeds from growing up. And sometimes in our faith lives, we have thin spots or bear spots where weeds come in.

It was happening in the church in Colosse, and it still happens today in our lives: People try to sell us a false bill of goods under the guise that we'll be better people, become immortal, and so forth. As one song said a few years ago, “The TV, she talks to me...I never knew soap made you taller.”ⁱⁱ **When our faith is thin, we're susceptible to these misdirections and poor teaching.** Although, to be honest: if soap *could* make me taller, I'd start showering more often...like two or three times a day! The point is, there are philosophies and ideals and ideas that are competing to be our foundation. And they're not going to present themselves as an agent of darkness. They will always masquerade as the light, to attract you, and make think that you're going to find what you're looking for.

For example, take horoscopes. Many people, including some Christians, check their horoscopes. Probably many of us in here could tell you what sign they are – Zodiac, Gemini, Capricorn...and so forth. But some people are really into it. In fact, just a couple hours after writing those sentences, I read an e-newsletter from a friend of mine who runs a coffee shop ministry in a small town in central Utah along with her husband. Here's a prayer request she wrote in the newsletter: “In our last newsletter I shared about our barista, Sierrah. She is a single mom with a 5-year-old son who is autistic. They have been living in her van...Sierrah is gaining some financial stability, and through God's gracious intervention, she was able to move into a two bedroom apartment this week. The rent is \$500/mo. [Definitely not Kirkland!] Housing is very scarce in our area, so this is a minor miracle. She recognizes [God's] hand in it and is praying [to God] for guidance. But she still lives according to her horoscope. Keep praying for God to show Sierrah

and [her son] how much he loves them and that Jesus can be their ever-present Father...Lord, [and] Savior.” **So this stuff really has a hold on some people – it does today and it did in the 1st Century Roman Empire, too.** But the stars are not God. You don't need them *and* Jesus Christ. They didn't create us. They don't sustain our lives or direct our outcome.

Or, how about materialism and wealth? It plays on all kinds of our emotions and desires, and is easy to succumb to. Buy this new cell phone (or subscribe to our service) and you'll be on the cutting edge of what's cool; buy this car and you'll be fulfilled; Buy a bigger home and your marriage will be better; Earn more money and all your problems will go away. Have you ever seen on a bumper sticker or someone wearing a shirt that said, “He who dies with the most toys wins”? **These kinds of messages are some of the biggest lies there are: that life is all about having fun, or acquiring stuff, or our wealth, or being trendy...and that with these kinds of things, life will be just perfect; that what you deeply desire is found in these things.**

But they always fall short. Have you ever met a rich person who didn't have problems? They just have different problems, and oftentimes much more costly ones. There is no such thing as a problem-free rich person. The trendy person is always adapting to the newest trends, looking to the people around them for approval and self-worth. There's no satisfaction there. The toys are often about pride and ego: but they get dated, passed up by newer toys, they break down, and so forth. And it's not that these things are bad or that we should avoid them – for example, we can all be glad that we're all wearing clothes, right? But when these things get a hold of us, and they become our source of joy, and purpose in life, rather than a tool through which to express our faith and foster community in which we share the gospel and make disciples, then our priorities are out of whack; we're giving them too much sway in our lives and we're standing in a light that isn't actually illuminating anything.

It wasn't just philosophies or cultural ideals that masquerade as the true light, either. The same thing happened with other religions and their rules and regulations. That's why Paul speaks of circumcision – a religious ritual from Judaism – and speaks of food, drink, festivals, new moons, and so forth as well, which come from a mix of Judaism and pagan religions of the day. He

advises them not to partake in those things, because they aren't needed: they're empty religious rituals. And then in verse 20 we get the peak of this passage – maybe the entire letter. He writes, **“Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules?” (Colossians 2:20).** I don't know that this needs much explaining, but he's simply asking them: Why are you living the way that you used to? Why are you still caught up in the deception of worldly stuff and spiritual forces? Why are you continuing to look for abundant and true life in places outside of the light of Christ? Why are you upholding things that clearly are at odds with Jesus – stuff that he died for and which you also died to through faith in Jesus? That stuff isn't needed! All you need to know is that Jesus Christ was born, lived, was crucified, was buried, and was raised from the dead. He is sufficient! He's all we need; so let's stay rooted in him, and build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

There's a strong correlation between what Paul is saying here and what Jesus talks about near the end of Matthew 7, one of my very favorite teachings from Jesus and is a teaching that I think we all should underline in our Bibles and that all Christians should have committed to memory – if not verbatim, at least the general plot of the parable. Jesus says, “Everyone who hears these words and acts on them...” He is summarizing the Sermon on the Mount and we see here (like today's passage in Colossians) an emphasis on, and a correlation between, knowledge and action: knowledge isn't enough. That's not faith. We live by faith, based on what we know about Jesus.

So Jesus says, **“Everyone who hears these words and acts on them is like a wise person who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words and does not act on them will be like a foolish person who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (Matthew 7:24-27).** The person whose life is rooted in and built on Jesus Christ will withstand the storms. Notice that the person who builds their house on the rock isn't insulated from the storm. There are still storms. But that person is

able to withstand them. And some of the storms we face in life are exactly what Paul is articulating here in Colossians – the stuff that seeks to masquerade as true light and tempts us to look for the keys to life in them. But like the clown, we'll never find what we're looking for there.

Where in your own thinking and in your own living have you replaced Jesus with something else? What has slipped in to our thinking and impacted our living? Where have we allowed the rock foundation to be replaced by sand? **Where is our thinking about and believing in Jesus Christ a little thin and leading us to live apart from Him?** Where are we looking for abundant life, and joy, and meaning and purpose? Are we looking in the light of Christ, or are we like that clown, looking for it in a place that may be illuminated, but it's not actually showing us anything of value or worth?

Jesus Christ shines the only light that will give you what you're looking for most deeply: unconditional peace, joy, love, acceptance. You might not even realize those are the things you most deeply need. Too often we focus on the surface emotions, the fun times, the momentary high of a new article of clothing, a new television, a victory by our favorite collegiate football team. They touch on what we are looking for, but in the end they leave us empty: the clothing wears out, the television stops working, and the football team loses. Whatever it is that masquerades as true light, none of it impacts anything beyond this world. They are all short-lived. But Jesus has demonstrated is durability through the conquering of the grave. And so we continue to root ourselves in Christ, share the Good News, and shine the light of Jesus.

Whatever part of your life that's not in the light of Christ, God invites you this morning to bring it into the light. ...To get it on the firm foundation of Jesus. You might already be a Christian but withholding a part of your life from Jesus, or you might not have previously heard much about Jesus at all. It might be a significant part of your life, it might be a small part: Bring that aspect of your life to the cross, knowing that Jesus committed His life to the cross for that part of your life, and we can let it die on the cross with Jesus. No more of our old ways of living, or being influenced by the old ways of the world we once were caught in. Like that clown: no standing in

the light of something that isn't illuminating anything of value and worth. Let's come to the true light, the light of Jesus, and be rooted, built up, and established in Him, because Jesus is the only foundation we need, and is one that gives lasting peace, love, joy, and more in this life and in the life to come. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Dunnam, Maxie D. *The Preacher's Commentary*, vol. 31, p. 359-360.

ⁱⁱ Pearl Jam, "Ghost" from the album Riot Act.