

Our first reading is from Colossians, chapter one, verses 24-29. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh. I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. That is the church of which I became a minister, according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works up within me the word of the Lord. Please stand for the Gospel reading. Today's reading is from Luke eleven one through 13. One day Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.

And he said to them, when you pray, say, father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, give us each day our daily bread, forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation. Then Jesus said to them, suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, friend, lend me three loaves of bread. A friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have no food to offer him. And suppose the one inside answers, don't bother me. The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything, I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? This is the word of the Lord.

Do you want to come? Say it with me. You could say the amen. Okay. All right. Well, Lord, I pray for these young people as they go. If they would learn more and more that you listen to their prayers. And you love them. And, Lord, because you listen to their prayers, we ask that you would help them to remember to pray for us, for parents, for this church, the Tree of Life, and for their pastor and for their neighbors. So, Lord, bless them as they go. Now, in Jesus name and all God's people said amen. Amen. All right. God bless you guys as you go. All right. And now, Lord, I do pray for us as we listen to the preaching of Your Word, that you would work through my imperfect words to bring about greater understanding, greater apprehension, greater welcome of Your perfect Word in our lives, and that Your Word would work its purpose in our lives. For your glory in Jesus name. Amen. So there's a TV show that I love to watch, and when it comes out, a number of times I've binged watch it because I kind of found out about it after a few seasons had happened.

So I would just watch, like, show after show. We'd watch it almost every night, but now when it comes out and we have to wait usually over a year for the next season to come out, but we watch it without fail. It's called the Great British Making Show. How many of you all have seen that? Okay, I highly recommend it. It's on Netflix. Here's the premise. They gather a bunch of amateur bakers from around the country, and they have a contest. And each week they're supposed to do three bakes two that they know of, in other words, two that they've prepared for. One is called the Signature Bake, which they'll really go all out on that. It's supposed to look beautiful, supposed to taste wonderful, and they'll put everything they have into it. But the second challenge is called the Technical Challenge, and they never know what the technical challenge is going to be until it's given to them. When the Technical Challenge is given to them, they're told that they're to make things like atart acetron or Rambaba or the Queen of puddings. And half the time they're scratching their heads because they're like, I've never heard of that.

I've never seen it. Every once in a while, somebody has, and they're like, oh, I've got a leg up. But they're given a recipe, and they're given the ingredients, but they're given very sketchy details about what to do. At some point, it says, now bake it. You're like, Bake it like, what temperature? How long? Or they're told to whip up a custard. And if they're really familiar with custards, that's great. If they're

not, they're kind of in trouble. So I just get a kick out of it because typically what happens is they'll bring forward their banks, and the judges will come out and they'll look at some of them like, what is this? Or they'll taste some of them, it's wrong. Or, I could almost break my teeth on it. It doesn't look right. Good flavor, bad texture. It's just funny when that happens. But when they're able to bake something that they've practiced and to bake something that they know and to present it before the judges, oftentimes the answer is, this is amazing. I would be proud to put in a restaurant and to serve the people, and occasionally one of them will get the Paul Hollywood handshake.

Paul Hollywood is one of the judges, and if he shakes your hand, you watch these people just melt because he's basically saying, you've achieved perfection with this bake. We're looking at a passage in Scripture today in Colossians where Paul has a vision for the perfection of the church. Jesus said, be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect. And Paul is he's writing to the Colossus, says, hey, this is my prayer for you, that you be able to live into the perfection that the Lord has for you, that you be able to be holy, baked in essence. Not raw, not ooey goey, not over baked, but done just right. How is that possible? What does that look like in a person's life? People often hear that be perfect. And they said, well, that's impossible. And yet Jesus exhorts us. Yet Paul praised for us that you may be perfect, that you may be complete in Christ. Now, I heard somebody say the other day they were kind of in an argument with somebody about some interpersonal dynamics. And they said, when I look in the mirror, I'm 100% satisfied with what I see. Are you and the person being defensive and everything said, I'm totally alright with what I see in the mirror.

And I thought about that and I thought, I'm not always all right with what I see in the mirror. Some days I'm fairly at peace with what I'm looking at, but other days I'm just not completely all right. I look at myself and I think, I don't know if I'm where I should be. But Paul says, I'm praying for you. I'm praying for the church that you might be. Is it possible and what to look like? We're asking this very question in our parish council the other day. We were talking about what's it mean to be mature in Christ, to be spiritually mature, to be a disciple. And we began to talk about our own experiences, things that we'd learn. We talked about biblical literacy, about Christians who understand not just certain parts or verses of the Bible, but understand it as a whole, understand how the stories fit in together and how Jesus fulfills the story. We talked about mission and Christians who are mature. Are Christians often on mission? They have a sense of God's outreach in the world and they want to be part of that. We talked about relationship, about how Christians interact with one another relationally and how committed they are to meeting together and being in worship together and learning from one another.

And our great desire in the conversation was that we might land in a place where we would ultimately be able to paint the picture for this church as it's getting established for what spiritual maturity looks like and help people to step into it. Not to say, okay, here's a level, and this group of people over here have arrived, and we're exhorting you to get, but rather what's kind of the whole picture look like of maturity in Christ, and where is it that you need to grow? Where is it that I need to grow? Where is it that we need to grow? I thought it was interesting that on this very week, when we're talking about this, this passage deals with that very subject and maybe some of the ingredients or some of the elements that go into developing maturity in ourselves and in a church. For Paul, it's very interesting if you talk to people about what spiritual maturity is, they often think in spiritual terms, they often think kind of up in the heavenlys and what needs to be going on internally. But Paul actually speaks physically, often, of what it means to be mature, and you can hear it in his language.

He says, Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you. So what was it that Paul was suffering at this point? He's writing this letter from prison. It may be that he's actually writing it from his final imprisonment, in which he's waiting to stand before Nero, to whom he'd made appeal. Not a good idea to make appeal to Nero, is it? Of course, at that time, you didn't know how Nero would turn out, what a persecutor of Christians he would be. But he's made an appeal to Caesar because the Jews want to kill him. And so he's possibly in that prison at that point, awaiting that trial, he's saying, I want you all to know that I actually rejoice in my suffering. The reason I'm here is because I've been sharing the Gospel. The reason I'm here is because I've been encouraging people to plant churches and for the gospel to spread. And I actually rejoice for the reason that I'm here, and I rejoice in my sufferings for you. What do we suffer for others. And why do we suffer for others? The answer was spoken right

here. Because we love them, right?

My daughter and her husband are visiting with our little granddaughter Olivia, who's a month old now. And when they walk through our door, they're just exhausted, exhausted because she's been keeping them up and crying at night, and they're suffering for her. But it's worth it, isn't it? It's worth it to suffer for loved ones, to see them develop and to grow, to be nourished and strengthened. Paul says, I rejoice in what I'm suffering for you. That's a very physical thing. I lose sleep. I labor, I pray. I rejoice in what I'm suffering for you. And I'm filling up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the Church. Does that sound funny? I'm filling up in my flesh what is lacking in Christ afflictions. When I've read that, I've wrestled with it, like, what in the world could be lacking in Christ afflictions? What does Paul mean? Certainly doesn't mean that his suffering upon the cross was somehow not enough. What it does mean is that Christ is continuing to suffer with the Church. Paul had his own experience of this. Before Paul was Paul.

His name was Saul. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees, and he was persecuting the Church. He was seeking to destroy the Church. And on the road to Damascus, a light struck him down, and he heard a voice. And the voice said, Saul, why do you persecute me? It was the Lord Jesus speaking to him. Why do you persecute me? Jesus was letting Paul know, I feel what my people feel. Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me. And so today, as the Church suffers, Christ suffers right along with it. And Paul says, I'm filling up in my body what is still lacking in Christ's affliction. In other words, what we still have to go through, I am going through for you. In Philippians 310, Paul said, I want to know Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from dead. I want to know Jesus. And the way we know Jesus, Paul tells us, is with our bodies what we suffer for the sake of others. Where church is mature, you'll see people suffering for one another.

I don't mean the kind of suffering where you're like, oh, whoa is me sort of thing, but we're really seeking the good of others and go out of our way sometimes for our own inconvenience. I hesitate to say this because I hope it doesn't seem like bragging. It really isn't, but it's just kind of humorous to me. As we've been building this community garden, I'm like, this is a lot of work. I feel this in my body. Like, I wake up some days the next day after working, and I feel it. I've got a strained ligament in my elbow now, which has affected my golf game. So that is really inconvenient. But why are we doing this? Why do we sweat? Why do we set up and tear down for the sake of others? I love that there's a diocese in the Anglican Church called the Diocese for the Sake of Others. It's not our diocese, but I love that name diocese for the Sake of Others. They want it firmly and squarely in the heads of their Church people that we exist for the sake of others, for the sake of one another, and for the sake of the world.

Out there. So realize that whenever you're hurting in some way physically for the sake of your children, for the sake of the church, for somebody that you're inconveniencing yourself for, that you are familiarizing yourself in maybe a small way with the sufferings of Jesus and you're stepping into maturity. I want to fill up in my flesh what's still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness. So for Paul, maturity is physical, but it's also intellectual. It is the whole word of God. So I love that in that meeting where our parish council was meeting, Matt really put it well when he said, it's the whole of the Bible. It's knowing the stories and how they all relate together, where the church is challenging itself intellectually to understand and grasp the Bible, understand it in its entirety, understand the purpose of the prophets and the poetry of the Psalms and the visual imagery of apocalyptic literature and the Epistles and the Gospels and how they're all woven together.

And they're woven together precisely to provide a fabric for our lives, a strength, a depth, a richness to our faith. And so as these kids are in there being taught the Scriptures, our prayer is not that they'll learn some little story, but they'll learn more and more. It will get into their bones of how it's all woven together. And as we hear the Scriptures proclaim day by day, as we gather in life groups and read Scripture to one another, as we find other ways to creatively share the word of God with each other, we'll experience God in his fullness and the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and

generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. And what he's speaking of there is the Gospel, how all of Scripture points to Jesus, how all of Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus, how he is he's supreme. He's the head. He's why we sing the songs we sing. Oh, the never ending, reckless love of God, how it chases me down, fights till I am found, leaves the 99. Do you hear the Scripture in that? It all finds its fulfillment in Jesus, and it's been disclosed to you and to me.

Now, what's disclosed to us is what we tend to take for granted those things that we know which are fresh and alive at some point in our lives, whether it's the Gospel or something else, at some point, we're always in danger, right, of just kind of taking it for granted. But the Gospel was one with blood, Christ's blood, for our sake. It's now disclosed to the Lord's people, to them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And here Paul kind of rounds out the recipe. It's just not giving our bodies our strength, right? It's not just giving our mind. For we should love the Lord, your God, with all your strength, right? With all your mind, but with all your soul, all your spirit as well. For he says, the glorious riches of this mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Now he speaks to our spirit of what we need to remind ourselves of all the time as we come together to worship this Jesus who we read up in the Scriptures, this Jesus for whom the Church works to glorify is in us.

And that's awesome. Doesn't always feel like it. It really doesn't. I forget it all the time, but Christ is in me and Christ is in you. And the view there is plural that Paul gives. He never wants us to lose sight of our togetherness in the Lord, but the Lord in the midst of his people, in our very lives, and he's the hope of glory. Do you have glory now? You've got hope of glory. Who hopes for what they already have? Scriptures tell us. But no. We by faith place our hope in what is yet to come. The world says, grab your glory now. Grab it in your work, grab it wherever you can. Grab it in your mind, grab it in your politics. However, go for the gusto, the glory. But as Christians, we know our glory is greater and it's still to come. Christ in us, the hope of glory. Christ in us the hope of the consummation of all the ages. So it's physical, it's intellectual, and it is spiritual. That's what makes a mature Christian. And it is possible he is the one we proclaim admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom.

Paul says, look, we got to keep each other on track here. Admonishment is something you do with your children when they're going astray. You admonish them, you correct them, you tell them the right way. Paul says that his job is to admonish and to teach the Church. But guess what? The Church's job is to admonish and teach one another that we as a church need to keep each other on the narrow path. We need to keep reminding ourselves of the basic truths of Christ wherever we go, astray we call others back. If you have a minister who goes astray that's a people, you're called to call him back or call her back. If you have a brother or sister, you admonish them and then you teach them a full counsel of God. Why? He says, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. It's as if we're all watching over the oven and saying, it's time to take it out, right? We're encouraging one another. And that's the other thing I love about the Great British Speaking show. If you watch any other competitive TV show where people really compete against one another, man.

It's cutthroat, but not in the Great British Baking Show. But each week somebody has to leave the show. They narrow it down until there's like, just three people baking. When somebody has to leave their show, they're like, oh, I was gutted when Fred had to leave the show. She's such a great baker. I miss him. They're pulling for one another, and sometimes when somebody drops something, somebody else is right there to help pick it up. It's a little picture of the church that we might present everyone fully mature in Christ, fully baked. To this end, Paul writes, I strenuously contend the word there is the Greek word *aganito*. I agonized with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. What did Jesus say on the night before he died, when he went through his own agony? What did he say to Peter, James and John? Come watch with me. Pray that you not fall into temptation. And Jesus goes off to the garden and he prays, and he's all alone because Peter, James and John fall asleep. And he wakes him up and he says, Pray, watch with me. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Isn't that true? Willing. All your names are listed in my prayer journal. My Spirit is willing to pray for you. I find it hard sometimes to pray for my family and pray for myself. My Spirit knows, give it all you got agonize, but my flesh is weak. But Paul says it's worth it. Discipline your flesh. That's why he says, I beat my body for the sake of the Gospel to discipline our flesh to enter into the sufferings of Christ.

For Christ suffered for us, and it's only in Him that we know the fullness of maturity in Christ. And that's what we're praying for as we step into maturity as a church. I want to ask you to be praying for not just the parish council, because now we're going to develop a little team of people that begin to really ask the question, what is spiritual maturity looks like? And not how do we develop a program to disciple everybody, but how do we develop a vision for discipleship, for the church with ways for people to connect to it, whether it's programmatic or relationally or however, so that everybody has the opportunity to continue to grow in Christ.

Pray for that team as we step into it. Pray that the Lord brings just the right people for that team as we think it through, and then it'll be shared with the congregation, and we'll have chance for feedback so that God might have before us a really full picture of what it means to be mature in Christ. But in the meantime, step into it yourself. I want to conclude with this. CS. Lewis said, I find a good many people bothered by our Lord's words be he perfect. Some people seem to think this means unless you are perfect, I will not help you. And as we cannot be perfect, then our position is hopeless. But I do not think he did mean that. I think he meant the only help I will give is to help to become perfect. You may want something less, but I will give you nothing less. You may want to settle for something less. As a Christian, I know I often do want to settle for something less. But Jesus wants to give me and to give you nothing less. I want to just ask you to remind yourselves of that as you come to receive communion today, as you think of all that Jesus gave for you and now what he is praying for you and the prayers he wants to answer in you.

He wants nothing less than your perfection, than your completeness, than a whole baked church. Sound good? Amen. Father, we pray that we would be perfect as you are perfect, not in a way we often think of a way that would cause us to boast about how good we are, how right we are. Put in a completeness, a wholeness that when people get a slice of us, they would taste you. They would see Your goodness, they would see your grace in Your mercy in our lives. They would see a people who are growing in you and that you might receive all the glory. Lord, we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Please stand for the Apostles Creed. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth was continued by the Holy Spirit.

Holy Father. You created us for you. For us to know you, love you and be loved by you. Impress on our hearts the greatness of the treasure we have to offer, a world of lost and lonely people. Father, help us to grow the church while always growing deeper in our life. And you encourage Patrick and Susan in the work you have for them here. We pray for all the people leadership that you would provide wisdom, strength and encouragement. Guard our hearts, God, from gossip, malice, pride and other sins that would destroy the community you have built at Tree of Life. Help us to be a place of welcome, love and encouragement to each other as we all grow in you. Help us to become agents of change and renewal for the world beyond the Church. We pray, Lord, for the people of Clayton and Garner to recognize their need for you, Christ and our feet further into the world for Your glory. Let us see others. Help us to recognize the needs of the city and Your call in this place. Finally, God, we lift up those around the world experiencing incredible heat for the elderly, Lord, for those without shelter and those with shelter inadequate to these times that's instincts of Your people, love, neighborliness, compassion and sense of caring for every member.

I invite you to add your own prayers in silence or aloud.

We ask all this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever remain standing. I guess maybe we're supposed to be standing. My bad. Or kneeling, if you're able. Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God. Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry. And we humbly repent for the sake of your son Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us and forgive us that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your name.

Now may our God and Father have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm

and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. The peace of the Lord be always with you. Let's stand and greet each other in the peace of Jesus.

All right, it can be seated for a moment, and we have our announcements on the back page. You can just click.