Colossians 1:3-6 3We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints 5because of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. You have already heard about this in the word of truth, the gospel 6that is present with you now. The gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world, just as it also has been doing among you from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth.

So what do you suppose they heard? I ask that because of what our text said. Verses 3 and 4 said, **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, BECAUSE WE HAVE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH."** So what do you suppose they heard?

Do you think they heard of complaints about boring services and the same old same old? Do you think they heard that attendance in Colossae was down or maybe it was up but not enough? Do you think they heard of a congregation that was way behind in its budget, of a congregation where Sunday School attendance was only one-third of what it could be? Do you think they heard of how unfriendly the people of this Colossian church were toward visitors or did they hear how it was so hard to follow the services? Do you think they heard of a church so involved with social things that they didn't care a bit for the truth of God? What do you suppose they heard?

Those are interesting questions. I especially ask those questions because I have been on vacations and have had ample opportunity to visit other WELS churches. Bulletins indicate, and Synod reports show that budgets are way behind and attendance is down yet Pastors know that complaints are up. Sometimes the churches were friendly and sometimes no one other than the Pastor spoke to us. But in truth, none of that mattered to me. What was important to me and what should be important to all was not what was heard about the church, but rather what was heard in the Church! Yes, I have an ample interest in what was heard in Colossae because what is heard in a church is the heart and core of the Church. It is good then that we have a congregation we can learn from. Learn important truths from. Learn the answer to the question that I posed. Our theme will be: **THE POINT OF FAITH.**

If there is one thing that is clear in the words of the Apostle Paul it is the fact that something, something rather wonderful had been heard about the Christian congregation that was gathered in Colossae. Here was a congregation very much alive with faith in Jesus. It was a congregation where Jesus and what Jesus was about was clearly its heart. It was a congregation that walked the beautiful road of truth and love as God had laid it out. Here was a congregation that was an example of what faith is to be, an example that we can still learn from.

Look at how our text describes this congregation, **"We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. You have already heard about this in the word of truth, the gospel that is present with you now."** Notice that these simple verses lay out for us two important aspects of this thing we Christians are to treasure in our hearts. First, faith itself is spoken of. Second, love is spoken of as the resulting action of faith. Let's look at both a little bit closer.

Let's start with the thing called faith. Faith is indeed something very specific. Faith has an object. In this case the object is Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Faith is about believing in Jesus and what Jesus has done. Faith is about the hope of Jesus. This hope is about the gift of heaven. This gift of heaven our text tells us is revealed in **"the word of truth."**

There it is in a nutshell. Faith is about our salvation. Faith is about understanding God's message of hope and deliverance from sin that is found in Jesus. Faith is believing what God has revealed in His Word, the Word that is about Jesus. Faith is founded on the fact that Jesus was born into our world, lived the perfect life we could not, and then suffered, died and rose from the dead to show that He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Faith is not preaching how we are to be community or how we are to live, act, and behave ourselves. Faith is about the Savior, the Son of God who has won eternal life and salvation for us because of what He has done. In other words, simpler words, faith is about grasping that in Jesus your sins are forgiven and you in Jesus are made a child of God and an heir of eternal life.

Does that sound too simple? Yet it is the truth. This text tells us that the Colossians were all excited about Jesus. They were all giddy with the marvel of God's love that declared that though they were rotten sinners who deserved only hell, God had sent His Son who had won for them the eternal gift of heaven. This was their hope. The hope of eternal life in heaven. The hope of sins forgiven and their adoption as the children of God. The hope of all the wonders of God that is revealed to us in the marvel of God's Word.

God's Word is the word of Truth. It is the heart and core of all that we know. It is the surety of all that God has done and it contains the very means, namely the Gospel, that God uses to bring us into this marvel of faith. Yes, it sounds simple. It is simple. God in love has sent his Son and because of Jesus we have the gift of eternal life and salvation. God's Word of truth is a message of love for us.

I don't know if we really get that message. I see people who claim faith but I don't see Christ in them. I hear people talk Christ but I don't hear the truth of God's Word. I see people who use the Word of God but they bend it to suit what they want not what God has revealed. I have run across more people with a, "Oh yeah, Jesus" attitude which means that Jesus is usually somewhere on the far back burner of their life. I know of churches where the message of Jesus is not, NOT what is heard in their services. They talk of how we should live and what we should be. They make their services exciting and modern and flashy, but Jesus as the Savior from sin is not there. I was recently at a church where it was clear the Pastor did not believe in the actual physical resurrection of Jesus and I doubt actually believed the Bible is Gods Word! No wonder the Christian church is dying in America. Jesus is absent! God’s truth is gone! It needs to be different.

It was different for the Colossians. They had Jesus on the front burner. The Colossians were filled with God's love and God's power. The Colossians took that message of God's love in Jesus and then used it in their life. Christianity wasn't just a group they belonged to it was a way of life for them.

To see how this message of Jesus was a way of life then look at how our text refers to these people of faith. It shows us the result of this faith in Jesus. The result is action, action that is called in our text: **"the love you have for all the saints."**

Those words tell us that the love of Christ was evident in the life of the Colossians. We know that by the time Paul wrote this epistle to the Colossians the city of Colossae was on a downward spiral. Commerce and trade were being taken over by the neighboring cities of Hieropolis and Laodicea. Times were tough. Yet the Colossians showed their faith by working hard to take care of one another. While specific instances of this love are not given we can understand that this love was displayed in many good works among the members. Our text told us, **"The gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world, just as it also has been doing among you from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth. 7You learned this from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. 8He is the one who told us about your love in the Spirit."** God's grace produced the fruits of faith. God’s grace was growing because the gospel was the heart and core, namely the message of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins because of Jesus. You find among them a loving care and concern for God's Truth and each other.

Now I want to tell you that though this initial picture of the Colossian congregation seems to be that of the perfect congregation it was not. Colossae had it problems. The chief reason that Paul wrote this epistle was because the gospel of Jesus was under attack. Pastor Epaphras of Colossae had traveled 1300 miles to Paul to get Paul's help in dealing with the false teachers besieging his congregation. Let me share with you what our People's Bible Commentary says in this regard.

*"The false doctrine being promoted in Colossae was a man-invented religion of self-redemption. It sought to combine both Jewish and pagan ideas with the Christian gospel to produce what its supporters boasted was a "more complete" gospel than Paul and Epaphras taught...The Jewish element of the Colossian false teaching included a strong interest in Old Testament rituals, laws, and ceremonies....In fact, it appears as if they even went beyond the laws of Moses in their demand for self-denial and harsh treatment of the body...These ideas were combined with a pagan, philosophical superstitious interest in the spirit world and in the worship of angels. There was a hypocritical show of humility combined with an arrogant claim to having received special revelations. Over all of this seems to have hovered the idea that the Christianity Paul and Epaphras taught was too simple and unsophisticated, too easy. A higher wisdom, the false teachers proclaimed was necessary to achieve "complete Christianity."...The false teachers wanted those who listened to them to accept instead of the simple gospel a human religious philosophical system that, for all intents and purposes, negated Jesus' ministry and emaciated his gospel."*

Understand that what the Colossians faced is what many of us face today. The message of Jesus is under attack. The precious truths of the Gospel are still often called "too simple" or "not complete." We need to fight these falsehoods in the same way the Colossians did.

They fought by sticking to the Word and by lovingly correcting, rebuking, and rejecting those who undermined God's Truth. More important, they fought by sticking to the Word and by lovingly encouraging, building up, and training God's people in that Word of Truth. As they learned they grew. Grew in faith. Grew in love for each other. Grew in the wonder and joy of God's Holy Word. They knew they had the most wonderful message, the greatest good news this world has ever heard and they used it. Used it for themselves privately. Used it to reach out to others of the faith and used it to reach out to others in the world.

We can do the same. We can encourage each other in our church attendance. We can encourage our giving to the Lord of the Church. We can get this message of Jesus out by speaking to others of our faith, by being "welcoming" when people enter our church, or by simply being an active Christian example in the opportunities we have when we are out there in the world. We too can have Jesus on the front burner of our lives but first He must be on the front burner of our churches.

What have we learned then? We have learned what faith really is. It is first of all absolute confidence and belief in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us as our Savior. It is believing God's Word and knowing that God's Word is the only and final truth in all things. It is understanding God's grace and love for us and then being moved by that grace and love to be a people of action. People who love God. People who love the Word. People who love each other. God help us as we struggle in our lives to make Jesus and his Gospel number one. Amen.