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<sup>6</sup> Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in Him. <sup>7</sup> Keep your roots deep in Him and have your lives built on Him. Be strong in the faith, just as you were taught, and always be thankful. <sup>8</sup> Make sure that no one leads you astray with an empty and deceitful philosophy that depends on human tradition and worldly principles, and not on Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. <sup>10</sup> And you have been filled by Him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. Colossians 2:6-10

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Do you like walking? For many people, walking is an important part of the day. We walk from the bedroom to the kitchen. We walk from the house to the car. We walk in shops. And we walk and enjoy the beauty of creation as we seek to exercise our bodies. Of course, as we get older, walking is not as easy as it used to be. And we also recognise in some cases people find it very difficult to walk, and for some, walking is basically impossible.

Of course, we don't always have to 'physically walk' to 'go on a walk'. We can exercise our minds. We can travel to places within our minds – recalling memories of people and places, and many wonderful things that have happened in the course of our life.

We all need a friend to walk with, don't we? Many people walk, not only to exercise, but to spend time with loved ones. Walking can deepen friendships. Jesus went on these kinds of walks with His disciples, and He still likes to walk with us today. The Apostle Paul says (Colossians 2:6): "Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in Him."

Throughout his various letters to Christians, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of walking in an instructive and encouraging ways. In Romans 6:4 he describes our identification with Jesus in baptism and that "we also should walk in newness of life." In 2 Corinthians 5:7 he calls on believers to "walk by faith, not by sight," and in Galatians 5:25 to "walk by the Spirit." Paul calls on believers to "walk in a manner worthy" of the Lord, of God, and of their calling (Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Ephesians 4:4). In Ephesians 5:2 he commands us to "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you." In Ephesians 2:10 he explains the practical result of being saved by grace, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Then in Philippians 3:17 he instructs, "Brothers and sisters, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." 1 Thessalonians 4:1 he exhorts them to "walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more."

The Apostle Paul also contrasts the two types of walks. In Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:16 he contrasts "walking in the Spirit" and "walking according to the flesh". And so in Ephesians 5:15 he warns, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise."

Our walk is our really our follower-ship, our discipleship, our life as people who live in “the Kingdom of God”. But it is important to remember that walking with Jesus isn’t a task to be performed, but a relationship to nurture. When we walk with God, we enter the dimension where God unfolds the secrets of his kingdom. These are the paths that the ancients trod before us. Noah knew the secret of walking with God (Genesis 6:9), as did Abraham (Genesis 24:40). Through Christ, you can explore the glorious riches of knowing God like they did—and to even a greater degree because of the Spirit which has been given to us! God wants to walk with us before He works through us.

In his letter to the Colossian believers, the apostle Paul was encouraging his brothers and sisters to rest confidently in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They were being tempted to turn away from a simple trust in Him; and to, instead, seek “completion” in human philosophies and pagan spiritualities and religious rituals.

You’ve been brought into the new environment called Christ, and you have to walk in that environment. For example, if you’re in a car, you’re in a different environment. If it’s an air-conditioned car, the outside may be hot, but you’re moving around in your car, enjoying a different environment in the car, unlike the pedestrians outside.

This is reminiscent of the experience with the children of Israel when they left Egypt for the Promised Land. They went with their own atmosphere. The Bible says, “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (Exodus 13:21-22 NIV).

Everywhere else in the desert was hot and arid, but God’s people dwelt in His divine presence. The pillar of cloud shielded them from the scorching heat during the day. At night, when it was cold, they had the pillar of fire which gave them warmth. In the same way, in Christ, you have your own atmosphere. When you’re going to work, you’re in this environment called Christ! When you’re at home, school, place of business or marketplaces of life, you’re in that environment.

Have you ever considered that Jesus could actually be walking alongside you? Like right now, in this very moment—even though you can’t see him. If you knew that for sure, how would it change your day? Your life? Because you can’t see or hear Jesus with your physical eyes and ears, walking with him takes a different kind of seeing and hearing. And as you learn to walk with Him, your faith will grow, and your life will never be the same.

One of the finer films from the 1980s is Bruce Beresford’s *Tender Mercies*. The film chronicles the story of Mac Sledge, a one-time country-western singing star whose life dissolved into a fog of alcohol and restlessness. Divorced from his wife and estranged from his only daughter, Mac staggers through life until one night he collapses onto the porch of a small motel in the middle of the Texas prairie. The motel is run by Rosa Lee, a young widow who is raising her boy,

Sonny, and trying to make ends meet. Even though Mac is a drunk and difficult person, Rosa Lee takes him in, sets him to work for her, and through this, transformation comes to Mac's life. Over time he kicks his drinking habit, becomes a father figure to Sonny, ends up marrying Rosa Lee, and begins attending church in which Rosa Lee is a member of the choir.

In one scene, both Mac and Sonny are baptised one Sunday morning. After the pastor dunks him into the waters, Mac stands back up, with water glistening on his beard. It's a portrait of grace. But after the service, Sonny and Mac are sitting outside the motel and Sonny says, "Well, we got baptised. But do you feel any different?" Mac says, "I can't say I do, not really."

But Mac is different. Mac is a changed man. Outwardly the baptism doesn't seem to change much, and it surely doesn't make life necessarily any easier. In the course of the film Mac manages to have a kind of reconciliation with his estranged daughter, now in her mid-20s. But no sooner does this good thing happen and the daughter is killed in a terrible car wreck. Near the end of the film, still grieving, Mac stands in the middle of a vegetable garden and tells Rosa Lee that he doesn't understand life. He can't understand the tender mercies of God that led him to Rosa Lee and to the transformation his life so badly needed. But then, he can't understand why his daughter had to die, either. We often hear people pondering why bad things happen in life, but Mac is honest enough to admit to being equally flummoxed by the good things. Grace can be as arresting as tragedy.

Mostly, though, grace and tragedy, the good and the bad, co-exist in this life. Yet as Christians journeying through this world, we say that the one thing that makes the difference is Jesus, and being joined to Him in baptism. Colossians 2 is a remarkable passage for many reasons, not the least of which is the weight that Paul loads onto baptism.

In Colossians 2, it is nothing short of startling to see how often Paul talks about our being either "in Christ" or "with Christ." It all stems from baptism, Paul says. Baptism catches us up in the power of Christ's death and resurrection. Once you are baptised, it's almost as though you need to send out the spiritual equivalent of those "Change of Address" cards that people give to others to let them know the new address after moving house. Paul teaches us that after baptism, we are spiritually relocated. It's a change-of-address for our hearts.

Have you ever looked over your past, seen the way you have lived, and wished with all your being that you could just 'start over'? Well; if you are "in Christ", then—before God—you have started over! You're not simply the same old person who simply had a super-spiritual 'make-over'. As far as God is concerned, the old "you" has died and has been buried in Christ; and a brand-new "you" has been raised up together with Him. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17; "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

In our Reading for this day there is a very important message about Jesus: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). We could spend a lot of time reflecting on what this means in terms of "Jesus IS God". The word "dwells" comes from the Greek word *katoikeo*, which means: "to settle down and be at home." The present tense indicates that the essence of Deity continually abides at home in Christ. He is fully God forever. And as the One possessing all the fullness of Deity, Christ "is the head over all rule and authority." He was not one of a series of lesser beings emanating from God, as the false teachers maintained. Rather, He is God Himself. But there is a very pastoral element to what is said here.

"In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" means that the Incarnate Christ who suffered and died, who rose from the dead and returned to His glory is sufficient! He is and he has everything a man or woman need for life and salvation and beyond! How beautiful are these words Paul reminded the Colossians of. We have Christ, and in Christ the Christian has forgiveness, and cleansing, freedom and victory on every level we can imagine. The fullness of God, "the whole Godhead", comes into your life when you receive Jesus. What more do you need?

Our faith in Christ is not a leap in the dark as philosophers like to claim in their own ignorance. Our faith is built securely upon the truth of Jesus Christ and His promises. As we walk in Him, the bonds of faith continue to increase and strengthen so that we remain firm even when we encounter the trials that test our faith that James 1:2-4 tells us will come.

When we're going through trials or facing disappointments and heartaches and feel so completely alone, God is there with us. He's walking with us through our fiery furnaces, as He did with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He's walking with us through our valleys, as He did with David. And He's walking with us down our road of hopelessness as He did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Every day of your life Jesus walks with you. Through the suffering, He is there. In the moments of joy, He is there. When you are lonely, He is there. In the moments when doubt presses in and tells you that you are alone, He is there. Every day, He is there, and heaven awaits. No more loneliness, no more doubt, no more sorrow or pain, so we walk by faith with the hope of fulfilled promises and perfect eternity.

Christ in us the hope of glory. This powerful truth may be hard to imagine, but it's the foundation of our peace in the trials of life. Christ didn't take on the cross and defeat death so we would be defeated. He did so that we would live victoriously for the Kingdom.

It can be difficult to feel victorious when we experience hard times. But when our life has its roots in the love of the Father, and the sacrifice of Jesus, this will cause our hearts to overflow with joy. Out of joy comes our thanksgiving to Him who gave all so we would live victorious. Amen.