

Colossians 1:15-28 Connections
July 20, 2025

On the last night of the Biennial Mission Summit, Sunday July 6th, people from the First Kachin Baptist Church in Omaha led the worship. The children and youth, dressed in traditional attire sang and danced the praise of the Lord, and their pastor, Zau Sam Lahtaw, like many of the rest of them, born in Myanmar, gave the sermon.

I don't remember what song they sang or what he said, but I remember *them*. They told their story joyfully and beautifully. Part of their story goes all the way back to Adoniram Judson, the first baptist missionary, who brought the gospel message to Myanmar, then called Burma, in the early 19th century.

Later, at the end of the 19th century, there was a baptist missionary named Ola Hanson, who was from Oakland, Nebraska, just north of Omaha, who was sent to the same part of the world. Whereas Judson spent decades among the Karen people, you may have heard of the them before, Hanson introduced the gospel to the Kachin.

A century later, when people from Myanmar migrated to America, they chose Nebraska as their new home. Even though they knew him only by reputation, they wanted to be near his hometown. Now there is a thriving Kachin Baptist Church, and they blessed us with their message.

It was my first Biennial, and I was not sure what to expect. It was a convention and had all the things conventions have. There were chicken dinners . . . there were breakout sessions. There was a business meeting with only three very routine votes and no discussion; the nominating committee report, the financial report, and some cosmetic and noncontroversial by-law changes.

The budget of the national ministries has declined in the last thirty years from \$45 million to just less than \$5 million. The influence of the so-called, "great decline," has been felt. It didn't seem to bother anyone.

There were people who hadn't seen each other in awhile, having reunions. There were conversations about theology and other related things. The praise band was very good, but it was a praise band. There was only one hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." They agreed to meet again in Rochester New York in two years.

The theme of the week was, "Living Water," and all the preachers did themes on the passage in the Gospel of John about the Woman at the Well and her conversation with Jesus, who met her there in Samaria, and *told* her about living water, that if she drank it, she would never thirst again. I thought of the window in the back of our church.

American Baptists are a very diverse group of Christians doing good work all over the world. The

world has changed, and the work of Christ is changing. There *are* signs of life. ABCUSA is finding its way in a new and different setting.

I kept running into people from Georgetown College in Kentucky. There were two missionaries serving in Italy, and the pastor of the FBC Church of Lawrence, KS.

The center of it all is Christ, who is, of course, the one who met this unnamed Samaritan woman who adorns the sanctuary in which we now worship. It is easy for Christians to lose their center. When we do, it is normally some version of the self that replaces it. We have all heard about being, “self,” centered. Along the way, the Holy Spirit gently returns us to it.

The world offers us the pursuit of beauty and pleasure and excellence, wealth and power, even if only in small measures. It tells us that the highest meaning in life is to be found in whatever we can achieve along these lines. The gospel offers us Christ, crucified and raised, and offers lives lived in service to Christ, and after his example, in sacrifice for others, as the source of a meaningful life.

The first chapter of Colossians offers an example of this message. In it, Paul proclaims again the main feature of the message that had grasped him and called him and had given meaning to his life and words and actions.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,” he tells us.

He goes on, like in the beginning of the gospel of John, to proclaim Jesus as the fulness of God who participation in creation, and by his death and resurrection has brought redemption, that old theological word which means, “to buy something back.”

This old religious language and these old theological ideas, and this old church, and by this old church, I do not mean *this* one, I mean the church in the world; trying to retain its message in these new times, when it seems like everything has changed, but not really as much as one might think.

We have new emphases, like social justice, although the bible has always emphasized it, and new worship styles and architectural traditions and forms; not so many stained-glass depictions of biblical scenes, and more praise bands. We do have the same gospel.

This gospel serves as the foundation of our personal lives. It establishes human self-esteem. It tells us that we are created in the Image of God, that we are limited by the constraints of this creatureliness and the reality of sin, and that we have been accepted by God nonetheless through Jesus Christ; forgiven, restored by the Grace of God.

We are given a litany of expressions that reveal the multi-faceted nature of salvation; forgiveness itself, but also healing, liberation, reconciliation, resurrection, each one expressing a nuance of this holistic notion of personhood in God. *We are connected to God.*

It also tells us that we are connected to each other because of our common faith in Jesus Christ, and this bond is strong like a family, even though we have in some ways very different experiences and interpretations of life. We learn, from admonitions in scripture to love each other, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, and even the love of enemy; about the value of every person in the sight of God.

And we are connected to the world, in the sense of all the world's people; including those whose Christian faith is different from our own, those who do not share the Christian faith at all, or who claim no faith, for all of us have been summoned by the same God and live under God's grace, this gospel, "which," Paul tells us, "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." From these truths we learn not only our own value, but that of every other person. From the example of Jesus we learn mercy.

Christians in the world today span the spectrum of thought and practice. One unmistakable feature noticed at the Biennial is all the ways that Christians differ; from the ethnic and cultural variety that was displayed just in the gathering itself, that wonderful Kachin youth choir; to the worship and style differences and to the variations of theology and practice that share a foundation in the Christian faith and its baptist expressions.

I love all of these connections and felt them throughout the meetings in Omaha. If we are open, the

Spirit of Christ draws us together, unites us in faith and love, and centers our lives in the life of Jesus.

Listen to the words from Colossians 1, not the reading for the day, but part of last week's reading, which speak also of these connections:

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)