

Walk in Christ (Colossians 2:6-15)

## **In Paul's letters, the command to walk is moral exhortation.**

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*Continue to live your lives in Christ.* The letter to the Colossians urges its readers to live as transformed people and presents that radical renewal with many, varied, and vivid metaphors.

A few years ago I had the inviting challenge to write a feminist commentary on Colossians for the Wisdom Commentary series from Liturgical Press. My writing partner, Claire Miller Colombo—a scholar of poetry and practitioner of theopoetics—explored together the beautiful and mysterious letter attributed to Paul.

We prioritized the participation of women and the centrality of baptism. We observed that in this week's passage the author uses vivid, dramatic, and violent metaphors to describe Christ's accomplishments.

But the metaphor that I want to pay attention to first of all here is not so dramatic. It is the one hidden in the imperative verb in 2:6, the one that is literally, "walk." The King James Version translates this command: "walk ye in him."

Feeling this verb as "walk" makes it more concrete than the New Revised Standard Version's generic "live." It conjures the physical striding or strolling, moving forward upright on two feet, that characterizes human beings, or did until we succumbed to the sedentariness of the modern world.

In the Gospels, to not be able to walk represents dis-ease, something wrong that calls out to be healed. Motionlessness might be caused by being paralyzed within or by being constrained without—by chains or by prison or by brute force.

Making the lame to walk, or better even to leap, is a sign of the dawning of God's coming (Isaiah 35:5-6). "Stand up and take your mat and walk" (Mark 2:9) is Jesus' shorthand instruction for being healed. The forgiven man heading out of the house through the door images liberation.

My favorite is in Mark 5:41-42. After she is raised from the dead—with the words *Talitha, cum*—the little girl gets up and begins to walk about. Walking is as essential a sign of living as seeing, hearing, and speaking.

In the letters the command to walk is moral exhortation. How you walk is how you live: walking in newness of life; walking honorably (Romans); walking in love (Ephesians); and, here in Colossians, walking in Christ.

The vivid and violent metaphors in the next verses convey the power of the forces that have constrained the Colossians' lives in the past, before baptism into Christ: "the record that stood against us with its legal demands" and "the rulers and authorities." As Claire and I worked and played our way through Colossians as women scholars and followers of Christ, we grew to know the women in the church in Colossae who embraced the spirituality of the hymn to Christ in Colossians 1:16-20, holding fast to Christ who pervades all things. They had been raised; they had been made alive. We imagined the triumph they shared with Christ, who defeated all the powers marshalled against them. We imagined how they stood up and walked forth into the world, growing from little girls to the full womanly stature of Christ.