

"Christ, Your Life"
Colossians 3:1-11
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
August 4, 2019

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Paul says, "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This morning we conclude our four-Sunday meditation on Paul's epistle to the Colossians. Though the letter includes a fourth chapter of various instructions, it really does culminate here in chapter three, with an exhortation that draws on and incorporates all we've heard in the last few weeks. So, let's meditate on it this morning before returning to the Gospel reading next Sunday.

Paul begins this morning's section by appealing to our baptismal life: "If then you have been raised with Christ." Remember that from last Sunday?, when Paul said we were "buried with Christ in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." In Christ's resurrection, you have been resurrected... that is to say, baptized into Christ's promises confirmed by His resurrection, you now live in the baptismal worldview that looks forward to Christ's glorious return when he will raise your body from the grave and bestow upon you the long-awaited fulfillment of your inheritance.

You have been resurrected out of an earth-bound worldview of “your best life now” that seeks self-pleasure at every turn, a “dog-eat-dog, survival of the fittest” mentality that depends upon and defends self as god above all. You have been granted the eyes of faith that are able to look beyond the futility of this world and recognize the truth of the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

That is not a looking into something spatially different. The right hand of God is not a geographic location, but a recognition that His is *the kingdom, the power, and the glory*, and that Christ the victorious Lamb shares with Him in the ownership of salvation, the new creation, and all that has power to bring us out of the desolation of this fallen life and into the life of the world to come. To seek the things that are above, where Christ is, is not to lift your eyes into the air or your head into the clouds; it is to be grounded in the doctrinal truths of Christ, not driven by the things on earth, but by the things in Scripture that point to our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, as verses 2 and 3 now reiterate:

“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Consider that baptismal language. You have died – buried with him in baptism, granted a share in the likeness of his death, that we

might be granted a share in the likeness of his resurrection. And, in that baptism, a gift – as we saw in Zachary’s baptism last week – that is totally unobserved by sight, unseeable by this world, unsearchable by and hidden to those who disbelieve the promises of Christ, but – for those who trust Christ’s word – the mysteries of baptism, the mysteries of the baptismal life are hidden and stored up and safeguarded for us with Christ our Lord, who – upon his ascension (the Scriptures say) was “hidden” from the disciples sight. Hidden, but not gone. Hidden, but not removed. Hidden, but not stolen or fraudulent or false or futile.

So also your baptismal life is hidden... hidden even from *your* sight. Look in the mirror and you will not see your baptism; you will not find the inheritance stored up in the heavenly realm. Look in the mirror and all you will see is the evidence of sin and the fall... the skin blemishes of youth that remind us that the once soft, smooth safety of infancy only hides a body and soul growing up in a broken world quickly tested by the anxieties of life... those youthful blemishes that, with a little tender care, seem to go away only lull us into a false hope that this world’s cares are solvable by man. Soon, it’s not youthful blemishes, but the wrinkles of frustration with the world’s sin, the regret of your own sin, the scars of marital problems, the sunken-ness of sleepless worry, the blemishes of irreversible aging, the evidence of approaching death. It’s all so plainly in front of you that the idea of the resurrection can’t seem to be found; it’s hidden;

your life in Christ is hidden; your baptismal identity as a child of God is hidden...

...hidden to the point that Satan tempts you to wonder whether your baptism is truly of any aid and comfort, and whether the Holy Supper is merely a ritual of religious superstition, and whether the preaching of Law and Gospel is really God's Word or whether it's Man's smooth-talking way of keeping your allegiance here rather than doing something else with your Sundays... and all that doubting makes you wonder whether any of Christ's promises will ever be tangible, whether any of it is really worth hoping in.

But when Christ (notice, not "if", but "when" – it is going to happen!)... and *when* it happens, *when* he visibly returns in all his glory, *when* he appears there will be no doubt. When Christ appears the vindication of our hope will have no doubt. When Christ appears your life will appear for what it always has been in baptism... you will see yourself and 'pinch yourself' and recognize yourself and acknowledge yourself as that one you have long been told you are... purchased by Christ, redeemed by Christ, baptized by Christ, resurrected by Christ. As St Paul says it, "you also will appear with him *in glory*."

And, if that's who you are, but simply hidden... if that's what you've been baptized into, but simply unseen... if your true identity lies in the things above, where Christ is (His doctrine, His Word and

Sacraments, His glorious care for His Church), “therefore”, Paul says, “put to death what is earthly in you.”

Friends, what use is it to try and hide the shameful fact that earthbound thoughts, words, and deeds rival Christ’s throne in our hearts and minds? Paul convicts *you* here: “Put to death what is earthly *in you*.” Yes, it’s you who know intimately the temptations and sins of sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry of various sorts. It’s you who have despised the second table of the Law and, in so doing, have despised the First. You know this to be the case... it really shouldn’t take the apostle or a pastor to point this out to you... for you yourself know that you have once **walked** and **conducted life** (remind you of last week’s text? – that “walking in Jesus” is not some spiritual ‘faith walk,’ it’s the conduct of daily life)... you once shamelessly, defiantly conducted daily life in this earthly, sinful manner. “But now,” Paul says, “you must put them all away.” Repent and put them away.

Notice the admonition here. St Paul doesn’t say, “But now, don’t worry, Jesus died for you so that you can keep on sinning. Don’t worry, Jesus doesn’t expect you to wrestle as a Christian as long as you say you are one.” Paul doesn’t say that; rather he says, “you must put away that Old Adam way of conducting daily life.” And what does Paul list? Does he go back to those shameful vices regarding which most Christians take pride they need not repent – outward theft, murder, adultery? No, Paul goes to the *heart*... where

every Christian knows his/her weakness: “anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, lying to one another.” You *know* those sins are yours... whether as husband and wife, parent and child, peer, friend, neighbor. You *know* the hardest thing to control is not your body, but your temper, your mind’s self-justifying rationale, your heart’s desire for revenge and vindication, your tongue’s inability to simply speak honestly and lovingly.

And it’s *these* things of which Paul says, “you need to wrestle against these things” and reminds you that this is part of what it means that you have “put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self.”

Remember, last week we talked about “putting off the body of flesh” – that’s what is ours in baptism because Christ “took on the body of flesh” and nailed our sins to the cross. And as he has paid for the guilt of those sins, why would we now continue to live as if those sins continue to reign over us? Paul says, “put off the old self *with its practices.*” Yes, there’s a very specific practice of the Old Adam, just as there’s a specific practice of the New Adam. We often talk about “right practice” when it comes to worship, and we all acknowledge that “practice” influences “doctrine” within the Divine Service. So then, why would we think it any different outside the Divine Service in daily life? Right practice is just as important in daily life as it is on Sunday morning. The one who says “I believe in Jesus”, then goes home and carelessly displays “anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene

talk” toward spouse, sibling, friend, or neighbor – how is such practice “putting off the old self”? Is it not evidence of loving the old self while wanting the eternal benefits of the new? Such is not faith.

Faith wrestles... wrestles not to earn salvation, but wrestles because it knows Christ is renewing those he has already saved. Notice how Paul describes the new self: “[You] have put on the new self, *which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*” Paul says you are in the process of being renewed. Processes can be ugly, painful, and can require a lot of patience and diligence. Such is the Christian life.

That doesn’t mean your justification is a process. You have been justified – “It is finished” – but the immediate justification that is yours in Christ brings with it and begins the process of ongoing sanctification (“the process of being made holy, of being made ‘set apart’ from earthly ways and unto Christ’s ways”). Sanctification is the reality that we are being restored to God’s original intent for His perfect creation. How does Paul say it, that the new self “is being renewed in knowledge after the *image of its creator.*” Adam was created in God’s image, lost that image in the fall, but in Christ – by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven – in *Him*, in our Creator-turned-Redeemer, we are being renewed in *His* image... this is what it means when it says that in baptism you have “put on Christ.” Justified by his righteousness, being sanctified in his image.

Thus, we rightly speak of the “new creation.” The new creation is not an altogether different cosmos; it is our same bodies, our same souls, justified by Christ’s righteousness and sacrificial death, and being renewed and prepared for our life that will appear with him when he appears in glory. “Here” Paul says, “[in this new creation] there is not Greek and Jew” – notice that: the races and ethnicities mean nothing, all of the anger, wrath, malice, and slander about who in our society is racist and who is racially enlightened – it’s all a waste of time because it’s not seen through the lens of Christ, in whom there is no Jew nor Greek. Nothing of **ethnic competition** about the new creation, neither anything of **status** – as if the Jews would appeal to Abraham and the Greeks would appeal to philosophy and wisdom; neither is there appeal to **human tradition** – whether circumcised or uncircumcised, for it’s only those traditions pointing to *Christ* that are helpful teachers here in the new creation; neither is slave or free of any differing **rank**, for the vocations are lived out in Christian love of fellow brothers in Christ.

In short, Christ is all and in all. He is the heart of the Gospel, the heart of the Church, the heart of the new creation. Apart from him, nothing matters; in Him, nothing else matters. He is all and in all, so that St Paul can tell the Corinthians with joy and conviction and contentment, “I determined to know nothing among you but Christ and him crucified.”

That's your joy and reason for conviction and contentment as well, friends. Here, in the new creation, we are hidden with Christ... having received Christ in baptism and having put on the new self, we can wrestle against the Old Adam without fear of harming the New Adam's reputation before God or before fellow Christian; we can be rooted in, built up in, and renewed in knowledge after the image of our creator through His Holy Word to us and His precious Sacrament of the Altar; here, we can put away the double-talk and deceit of the world, and we can speak openly and honestly of our hope in and foundation of Christ; here, we can eagerly await Christ's glorious return, because "when He who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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