

"You Have Been Raised With Christ"

(Colossians 3:1-4)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, it is easy to forget about the indescribable riches of your life in Christ now yours. We can get short-sighted and forget about what belongs to every Christian now that Christ has conquered death and joined them to His resurrection. We just forget about what is ours and what is to come. Even if you are a senior well into your 80's or 90's, for all intents and purposes, you've only just begun. But again in our short-sightedness, we forget about who we really are in the Risen Christ!

Traci and I love to watch movies together and we especially enjoy love stories. One of our favorites is a movie called *Love Affair* (released in 1994 and was a remake of the original movie released 1932). The newer version Traci and I are more familiar with stars Warren Beatty and Annette Bening. In that movie Beatty's character's loving aunt played by Katherine Hepburn is trying to explain to Bening's character that her nephew believes himself to be a "duck" where in actually he is really a "swan." It's not simply a matter of Beatty's character not realizing his potential, but he doesn't even realize what he really is. Through the combined forces of his aunt's love and his new-found love, Beatty's character breaks away from his habitual indiscretions and through his discovery of true love finds himself and you know the rest of the "happily ever after" of such movies.

There is a tension that I think arises in us when we think about such presentations. There is a part of us that really believes in them (the undying romantic) and there is another part of us that labels them as fantasies (where the pessimist dwells). But there are in the most endearing stories of God's creation called "humanity" certain correspondences to what is real. Sometimes the real you comes out later in time.

In real life I know a story of a little girl who was for all intents and purposes anti-school. When she was little she would fight tooth and nail against going to school. There were times when Traci and I would literally have to drag her down the stairs. When she was a little older, she didn't seem to mind being tardy and when she became a little older than that, didn't seem to mind not performing to the best of her ability. This little girl, however, changed and "changed" is a fantastic understatement. It is as if she became a different person and I don't think I know anyone as driven as she is. She is now doing a doctorate and earning the highest

marks in her Ph.D. program. Something happened to her, something “clicked” in her. What we see today, we did not see before.

In Colossians chapter 3 the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul is communicating to all Christians, like you and me, that there is *a real change* that has occurred in those who are connected to the One whose resurrection we celebrate this day. Once – and apart from the resurrection life in Jesus Christ – we were all like those living problematically in Colossae: they approached faith in terms of a stale religion dependent on the disciplines of men. They didn’t “get” faith and assumed that faith meant living religiously; following a bunch of rules. And even in the face of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, many folks mistakenly perceive the Christian faith as following the teachings and examples of Jesus. But if this is why Christ came what’s the point of His resurrection? If Jesus simply came to tell us how to live religiously...don’t do this, but do that, then we didn’t need Him to conquer death. But if this is the way we consider Christ, then we will never see the change, the transformation that God intends for us. We will all remain a bunch of ducks or stubborn children who don’t want to go to school.

St. Paul warns us though. The living faith in the resurrected Lord isn’t about: “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch...These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion...(Colossians 2:21-23a)”...and we have all seen this sort of thing, when people insist that Christ – even the resurrected Christ – came to teach us a new strategy for living, a new religious blueprint: do this, that and the other thing in your life and in your thinking to become a *real* Christian!

So St. Paul gets us back to where real life occurs and where the real change that Jesus came to give is experienced. That is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is not something for us to review as a remarkable event of history that is fun to laud as a great story so that we can have a big service once a year called “Easter.” It won’t do to treat the Resurrection of our Lord as anything but LIFE-CHANGING for us! In fact to live in the resurrected Christ transforms our entire lives and brings a change that one could never detect in the old state in a million years. The real life of the resurrected Lord Jesus will not permit us to remain stuck in life as a duck or as a little girl who only reluctantly goes to school, but in this case only reluctantly goes to church.

So what is it? What is this new life, this transformed life based on the Resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate this day? It is point blank the life of Jesus Himself. Now don’t let this become some esoteric assertion. I’m not answering a deep question with a deeper answer that will take you a life-time to understand. The answer in fact is incredibly simple. The life of Christ defeated death.

One theologian put it this way: “The security of the Christian is not that fancied by the Stoics. The Christian is secure, absolutely and essentially secure, because his life is hid with the risen Christ in God, i.e., with the One who was not overcome by the world but overcame it (Col. 3:3). Assailable and assailed though it is, it is not exposed to any threatened overthrow or destruction, nor to any serious disturbance. Its continuation is assured even though there breaks upon it the storm of every worldly force.” (Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV.3.2, 645). I know that sounds pretty sophisticated, but it is a longer way of saying what St. Paul says elsewhere, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31b) If Jesus Christ is your God who defeated the absolute worst, namely death – and He did! – and He has put you into His resurrected life that won the victory over death (and He did!), then what in this universe can truly threaten you? Not even death!

Needless to say we should be very interested in how to live in this real life. This is what our Easter epistle in Colossians 3 is about! First of all when you read, ***“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”*** (verse 1) of course you’ve been raised with Christ and your assurance is not anything “if’y” or “maybe”...but is absolute: you’ve been baptized into Christ, now Christ is your life. Through a real event in real time in a real place from a real pastor putting real water on you in the real Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, upon your real forehead...you were joined to the real Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ! His resurrected life now belongs to you.

You are now in an in-between state. You’ve received the spiritual benefits right now in this life and you will experience the physical benefits when He comes again in glory. This is the significance of verse 4: ***“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”***

In the meantime we have to learn to recognize that this indestructible life with all hope and all blessing through ANY struggle or hardship is something that we see not with our physical eyes but through faith. Verses 2-3: ***“²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ⁴For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”***

First be clear that to set your mind on things above is very specific: set your mind on Christ. Some people get all weird with this passage so that they start talking about “heavenly things” to the extent that before you know it, they become other-worldly and detached from living here on earth. That’s wrong. God loves His creation and He wants you here for a reason and everything created by God is good (1st Tim. 4:4). But as you live here, serving your family, doing your work, encouraging others, sharing your faith, living in love, do these in such a way that you live in Christ...knowing that in Him who conquered death, everything you do has

eternal weight and glory. Oh I know, so often we feel as though we are wasting our time; we are constantly tempted to cry out: “what’s the use,” but don’t give in Christian, because the greater reality is Christ who has conquered everything that could possibly mess up your real life. Your real life is secure!

So keep your heart, mind, and soul – all of you – on Christ who is risen! But as you do, just remember that your real life is hidden and this is where we typically struggle.

“Luther describes the contrast between the high dignity of Christians and the lowly form of their life on earth in these words: ‘We are even now the children of God, and through faith and Baptism have been put into possession of eternal salvation....But who among men recognizes the children of God? Who will call those men children of God that are thrown into prison and are so tortured and tormented in every conceivable way that they appear to be the children of the devil, condemned and accursed souls? For that reason St. Paul says that the glory of the children of God is now hidden, but shall be manifested in them later (Col. 3:3-4). So long as God’s children are here upon earth, they are not clothed with [the clothing of God], but wear the devil’s [clothing]....The right order is reversed: those who are God’s children are called children of the devil, and those who are the children of the devil are called God’s children.’” (Pieper, Francis, *Christain Dogmatics*, Volume III, 68-69, quoting Luther, St. L. XII:729f.)

You know Luther he was quite vivid and powerful in his writing, but he was just saying that sometimes even though we have the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, it doesn’t always *seem* that way. There are times when it feels like we wear the clothes of the weak one, the suffering one, not the victorious one, but the defeated one. Sometimes as Luther said, “the right order is reversed.”

But whenever you feel this way, simply go back to this one habit of faith: “seek the things that are above...set your [mind] on things that are above.” Return to Christ who went through His humility, His passion, and His crucifixion to save you, but then remember the rest of the story...He rose! In imitation of Jesus, you are now a little Christ, you too go through your versions of weakness, of humiliation, of struggle, of suffering...but remember your life dear Christian, your real life: Jesus who has conquered even death has shared His resurrection life with you!

St. Augustine: “But what did he go on to say? ‘When Christ appears, our life, then you also will appear with him in glory.’ So now is the time for groaning, then it will be for rejoicing; now for desiring, then for embracing. What we desire now is not present; but let us not falter in desire; let long, continuous desire be our daily exercise, because the one who made the

promise doesn't cheat us." (Gorday, Peter, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IX*, 47). In fact, the One who made the promise is also now with us, and already His victory over death *is yours* Christian so I say it again, "Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Allelulia!"