

**Colossians 3:1-4****You have already died with Christ**

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!).

Death was not the end. Death was never going to be the end. Jesus had not failed in his ministry by being arrested and crucified. As I preached on Good Friday, Jesus proclaimed from the cross that it is finished. He had fulfilled his purpose on earth. He was, as John the Baptist proclaimed, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And Jesus himself told us that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life. He is the good shepherd who knows his sheep and his sheep know him. And he also says in John chapter 10:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:17-18, ESV)

Jesus purpose and plan did not just include laying down his life for us sheep, but taking it up again. He has the power to lay it down and the power to take it back up again. And so when he declared from the cross that it is finished, this is a completion of purpose, but not the end of the story. Especially not the end of the story for those for whom he died.

The price has been paid, the wrath of God satisfied, the enduring sacrifice for the sins of the world has been made, and we are now reconciled with God. And so we get to share both in Jesus' death and resurrection. I began with the common Easter greet "Christ is risen!" and perhaps you responded, "He is risen indeed!". In our Colossians reading though we get a bit of a variation on that theme. The greeting might well be "You have died!", and in response, "I have been raised with Christ!"

Both of these are true at the same time. You see yourself as dead, and you equally see yourself as alive. You carry out the business of this earth in public and in broad daylight, yet your life is also hidden with Christ in God. When Christ is revealed in his glory, you also will be revealed in the same glory, despite your status as a sinner transferred from the kingdom of darkness. Christ's death is our death, and Christ's resurrection life is our resurrection life. And so St Paul appeals to the faithful in Colossae to leave behind their old lifestyle and embrace the way of eternal life now that they are bound up with Christ forever. As sinners they were once dead in trespasses and sins but now through the gospel they are dead to the world and alive in Christ.

For those in the community of faith, the starting and ending point of existence is Christ. We don't start somewhere else and get to Christ somehow. We don't begin with Christ to get somewhere else. We don't mix the best things about Christ into another foundation. We have died with Christ; we now live in and with Christ. This is the basis for the meaning of life. The clear imperatives in these verses concern where the believers are to set their focus: "set your minds on things that are above". "Things above" refers to what comes from the true God, the Father, and "his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

The point of the exhortation is that we should give our attention and worship to the true God instead of pretenders to the throne. We should give our attention to the one who has demonstrated power and authority even over death. This is not something trivial. Setting our minds on the things that are above is not a one-time-only decision but a decision that needs to be made over and over again. And the way we do that is by remembering that we have died. And since the death of believers has occurred in baptism, this passage is close to Luther's counsel that believers need to return every day to our baptisms and kill the old Adam.

The passage from Colossians helps us to connect the wonderful good news of Easter to our lives today. When Jesus is killed and when he is raised, in some way we are killed and we are raised with him. And all of this is wrapped in apocalyptic language. We don't usually talk about the end-times on Easter Sunday, but really we can't avoid it. Jesus' death and resurrection marked the beginning of the end of the old creation, and the start of the new creation. And although the new creation remains hidden until Jesus returns, we already live in it.

We cannot continue to live our lives as if things had not radically changed. We have died with Christ, died to the old way of understanding the world, and died to ourselves. It's not that we now live in some super-spiritual world which leaves behind God's creation. One day God will flood this present creation with the new life which is currently hidden in the heavenly realm. One day Jesus the Messiah, who cannot at the moment be seen within the old world, will appear again. On that day God will transform the whole cosmos so that what is at present unseen will become visible, and earth and heaven be joined for ever in the fulfilled new creation. And when that happens, all those who are 'in Christ', whose present true life is 'hidden with Christ in God', will appear as well, as the glorious renewed human beings they already really are.

But this resurrected life of believers, real though it may be is for the moment hidden with Christ. But we get glimpses of it as we fulfill the law of love. And Jesus in his life gave us glimpses into the heavenly realms as he too showed us true love. When we set our minds on the things that are above, we see Jesus, the Rabbi, the master, washing his disciples' feet. We see Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laying down his life for the sheep. We see Jesus bearing the weight of our sin, paying the price for our transgressions.

When we set our minds on the things that are above, we don't just see the greatness and power and glory and victory and majesty that belong to Almighty God (1 Chronicles 29:11). No, we also see:

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

What wonderful news that is. Our Lord Jesus did everything for us, and now we get to share in both his death and his resurrection. He is risen, and we are risen with him, having already died to sin in baptism, and already raised to life with him. So thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The victory has been won. And because he lives, we to shall live in eternity with him. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.