

Proper 13/Pentecost 8

Colossians 3:1-11

August 4, 2019

Christ Our Life — Past, Present, and Future

Dear brothers and sisters loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

On that glorious first Easter morning the angels appeared to Mary Magdalene and said, “Woman, why are you weeping? (Jn 20:13). She turned around and saw the



resurrected Jesus standing before her. Two thousand years later the adopted sons and daughters of God — that’s us — hear the apostle Paul tell us through his letter to the Colossians that we too are somehow raised, with Christ. It it’s hard for people to believe that Christ is risen from the dead; how much harder is it even for God’s people to believe that God has raised us together with Him? Isn’t it true that unless Christ comes back first that each of us will indeed die, and that in this life we often feel anything but risen again? Quite the opposite perhaps, we often feel spiritually listless, even dying.

So we hear in our epistle reading today, the last of our brief four-week journey through Colossians, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). This is baptismal language, the continuation of what we heard from the apostle last week where he said, “[and you were] buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12). So what does Paul mean when he says “If you have been raised in Christ?” That doesn’t sound very positive, does it? What does he mean, “if”? Is this a feeling or some special knowledge? Is there something we need that we don’t yet have? No, he means, “if you have been baptized, if you have been brought out of those waters sharing the death of the Christ, the death of the old sinful nature, and raised again to new life in Christ, then you have a different spiritual orientation. No longer do you seek the things below, but the things above.” Paul does not mean to insert uncertainty where there is faith. Rather, Paul reminds Christians of what they have received and what the implications are for that in the here and now, and to remind them of the future life they are promised with Christ who will raise them from grave into everlasting life. “Christ is our life” — our life past, present and future.

“Christ is our life” because He has raised us in to the light of righteousness and continues to pour the Holy Spirit into us through Word and Sacrament. He is also our life because He is the Author of our lives, for our very being is created through Him who created the universe and all that is in it — Paul told us: “**15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:15–16). All

things, nothing is exempt. Yes, we are created. You are not an accident, you are not a fluke of nature. You have been created, authored, out of the divine grace and mercy of our Heavenly Father who continues his creative work in his people, all through his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. And just as He is the author of our very life the Holy Scriptures also say that He is the author of our salvation. The writer of Hebrews says, “Jesus [is] the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2, AV). “I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus says. “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 11:25–26).

Christ is our life because He is the resurrection and the life. The one who has hope in Him is always alive, both now and forever. St. Paul has much to say about this life lived in Christ. For the new life to which we have been raised has implications for how we walk — remember that word? St. Paul is frequently teaching Christians about this walk.

“Seek the things that are above,” “set your mind on the things that are above.” These are the guideposts along this path. There are other guideposts as well that mark the way of that other path we don’t want to travel upon. We know what those are, that’s not hard to figure out. ⁷ “In these you too once walked, when you were living in them” (Col 3:7).

These are earthly things, not the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. St. Paul has a list: “sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and

covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5); “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth” (Col 3:8).

There is a serious error preached in many Christian churches that this salvation and righteousness that we have received cannot be lost through any intentional or arrogant sin or evil work. In other words, Christian can live a life that looks no different from the world in which they came out of, they can follow all the evil lusts their sinful hearts desire without fear or shame, they can resist the Holy Spirit and His means of grace, live in unrepentant arrogance and at the same time retain faith, salvation, and the righteousness of God. But there is a mutual incompatibility here. And therefore this is not a matter of indifference. Far from it. So the apostle admonishes Christians — “put to death therefore what is earthly in you.” Treat it as dead, because the old sinful nature, the old Adam, has been drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism.

But you know there’s somethings about that old Adam — he’s a good swimmer. In the Large Catechism Martin Luther speaks to this very point. “Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth.” You see, even though we have received all these wonderful things unto the forgiveness of sins and our salvation, we still live in a world beset with sin, and we still live with the consequence of that in our own bodies. Our flesh, that old Adam, seeks after earthly things, not the things above. You can think of this as a battle. And it’s true that we live in a state of civil war within our

own members. So we are called to fight the battle. Every day. We are not helpless against sin and the world and the devil who would constantly seek to bring us down and separate us from the love of Christ Jesus. No, far from it. “[W]hen we enter Christ’s kingdom, [our] corruption must daily decrease so that the longer we live the more gentle, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride.” So here in the Divine Service we receive the renewing and strengthening of our faith, which is necessary for this battle, when we confess our sins, in the hearing of His Word and in the eating and drinking of His very Body and Blood. So put off the old self with its practices, engage the fight, put to death what is earthly in you. Know that this renewal of repentance is available because of and through your Baptism. The “new self...is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:10). It’s ongoing, it’s happening right now and right here through Word and Sacrament.

Christ is our life: He is the author of our creation and our salvation and by the power of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament He keeps and sustains us in faith and empowers us to fight against the power of sin and darkness. And Christ who is our life will appear again in glory when He come to collect all that belong to Him, who are the sheep of His pasture, and restores all things in a new heaven and a new earth. The new creation that awaits is the glorious end of the revelation of God’s salvation. This is the hope of the Christian, who knows that the battles of the here and now are not the end, for there will come a time when reality of salvation that we already have in Christ will be completely and once and for all fulfilled. There will come a time when the foretaste of the banquet

feast of the Lamb that we have in Holy Communion will be fully realized when we gather around the throne of God. And on that day there will be no more battles, no more sin, no more death. “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (1 Co 15:42–43). We will appear with Christ in glory. For He is our life for all eternity.

Now seems to be the time for groaning and hardship and trial, but then it will be for rejoicing. Now is the time for desiring, then is the moment of embracing what we long for. What we desire now is not present, this is true. But let us not falter in desire for the things that are above. Let us continually desire to daily set our minds on Christ, who is our life — the One who made the promise, who seated at the right hand of God. From thence he shall come again.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ✠ Soli Deo Gloria