

Sunday 31 July 2022

Colossians 3:1 – 11 (& Luke 12:13 – 21)

### **The New Life in Christ (NRSV)**

**3** So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, <sup>3</sup>for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup>These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. <sup>8</sup>But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup>In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

[<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.]

### **Background**

I don't know about you, but I rarely receive personal letters. Most letters I receive are from organisations asking for some form of financial support; and many of these don't arrive by post, but by email.

When Paul's letter to the Colossians was received it wasn't delivered by post but brought directly to them from one of Paul's companions. And unlike today it wasn't photocopied and circulated so that everyone had their own copy. And unlike today there were very few people able to read the letter for themselves.

Chances are the letter was read to the Christian believers in Colossae at one of their gatherings in one of their homes. It was probably read in its entirety in a single meeting, although I can imagine with that being a more intimate setting there were interruptions and questions along the way.

Another aspect to be reminded of is that the letter was written to the group of believers. I suspect the English language doesn't help, but when we see "you" he means "you all" or "you together". What is written is true for us as individuals, but it is also true for us as a group of believers.

Perhaps we could change the tense of what is written, so that when we read passages like this together "you" is changed to "we" and "your" is changed to "us".

Whilst the context of the church in Colossae is very different to ours almost two thousand years later, there is no reason why the principles of what Paul wrote to the Colossians can't apply to us, here, today.

## Sermon

A television programme we enjoy watching is Kevin McCloud's "Grand Designs". I guess we started watching it when we had our own house extension built, some 20 years ago.

Whilst there is delight at watching a well-run project come in on budget, perhaps there is also some morbid delight at seeing the jeopardy in others: unforeseen ground conditions, over ambitious budgets (or architects, or both!), frayed relationships (with the builder, or within the family), and so on – perhaps our own experience wasn't so bad after all!

As a structural engineer I know that a good foundation is essential for a stable building or bridge. As with some of the Grand Design projects, misunderstanding of ground conditions or inadequate foundations can lead to costly design changes and accompanying project overruns.

But as a Christian, I also know that the resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock, the foundation, of our Christian faith. Without this we are like the foolish builder, in the parable Jesus told, who built their house on sand.

Earlier in the letter Paul said, "Since you died with Christ..." Now he says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ..." Vicar David reminded us that baptism represents our old self dying and being buried with Christ; it also represents the new life we have by being raised with Christ.

We have been raised with Christ! This has already happened! It's not just something that we hang on to for when we die! We have new life in Christ now!

What does this mean for us – now? From this letter to the Colossians, we know this:

- God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves ... in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (1:13).
- Once you (we) were alienated from God... but he has reconciled you (us) by Christ's physical body (1:21 & 22)
- When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ... (2:13).
- Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, ... (2:20).

So if you have been raised with Christ, ... the Bible version I use says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, ...

"Since, then, ..." links what Paul has been saying (in the previous two chapters) with what he's about to say. Paul has been reminding the Colossians of the basis of their faith.

We, together, have been raised with Christ. We, together, have been made alive in Christ. Christ's resurrection is the basis, the foundation, for our new life together as Christians.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25). And v26 – "and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

In his separate letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes (1 Co. 15:3-4), “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ...” And this phrase is included in the Creed that we proclaim together on some Sundays.

A question posed in last week’s Church Times was “if we are living the resurrection life in Christ right now, why does that resurrection life look so much like the life before Christian truth dawned on us? We go on failing to live up to gospel ideals!”

This is a challenging question and one that, if we’re honest, each of us ask, even of ourselves, at some point. I admit – I’m also a work in progress. This new life we have together in Christ has implications for daily living.

To consider this we could jump a few verses, to v5 (and beyond). As Christians here I hope that we know we shouldn’t have impure thoughts, evil desires, and not be greedy, that we should rid ourselves of anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language, and lying. And I hope, too, that we also know and want to have compassion and kindness, humility, meekness (or gentleness) and patience, tolerance with one another, to forgive each other, and have love for each other.

This is all good, but Paul first commanded the Colossians (and commands us) to seek the things that are above, to diligently pursue heavenly things – specifically Christ’s agenda. The image of Christ at the right hand of God reminds us of Jesus’ power and authority, something the false teachers (Paul warns them) had denied.

Paul added a second command: Set your minds on things that are above. This is in direct contrast to things that are on earth that can easily become distractions. Earthly things have their place because, as believers, we live in two domains: the fallen world and the heavenly realm. But where the mind goes, the life will follow. The key for the new life is learning to think rightly, keeping a consistent focus on Christ’s rule for our lives. Both David and Tudor referred to being focussed on Christ.

Last week, Nicky reminded us of the Lord’s prayer. In the Lord’s prayer our focus is on God our Father in heaven, not on earthly things. Our focus is on praying that God’s kingdom would come, that God’s will be done, and this is before we pray about what our earthly needs may be (our daily bread, for example).

To conclude: there was a man with a grand design plan – the rich man (in today’s Gospel) had a grand design plan to build two bigger and better barns to store all his grain. He said to himself, “I have plenty of good things laid up for years. Now I’ll take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.” It didn’t do him any good, did it?!

We have been raised with Christ and have a new life in him. God has a grand design for our lives.

Let us seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Let us set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Amen.