

Col. 3:1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Col. 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 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!

Col. 3:12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 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. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 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. 17 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.

DOING THE EXPERIMENT

In a YouTube video a group of college students lined up a huge number of coke bottles and with symphonic music playing in the background they dropped in Mentos mints in time with the music. This sent the soda soaring from each one like a geyser.

Now you can't believe everything you see on the Internet. So a friend decided to do his own experiment.

With his wife looking on incredulously he took several bottles of soda into the back yard and dropped in the mints. Sure enough soon he was covered in soda. It was not a hoax. Mentos and soda equal a sticky geyser.

I have no desire to prove that Mentos and soda will make a mess. I'll leave that to the boys on YouTube.

But, there are some more important truths that we all need to prove for ourselves. For example, we say that God was in Christ, and just as Jesus died and rose again so we are called to die to the old way of life and rise to walk in a new way.

The truth of that statement needs to be proved in our lives. According to this passage the resurrection is not only a truth to be believed but also a power that needs to be practiced.

Paul told the Colossians, “So, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ...”

Now at first that sounds like Paul is saying that the Colossians should have their heads in the clouds. It sounds like they should be an otherworldly, spiritual people who have nothing to do with the mundane matters of this world.

But, as we look at this passage in more detail we see that's not true.

Belief in the resurrection does not make us otherworldly. Instead, it causes us to critically evaluate the ways of the world and our own lifestyle. Christians are called to bet their life upon the truth of the resurrection. Christians are called to let their choices and their behavior reflect their belief in the resurrection.

It's not just a matter of saying that we believe something is true theoretically. We have to do the experiment. We have to put our faith into practice. When Jesus said that we are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he meant that we are called to be an example of God's heavenly kingdom here on earth.

Just as Jesus gave us a flesh and blood example of God's love and forgiveness so we are called to flesh out that love and forgiveness in our own lives. Resurrection power enables holy living today.

GRACE AND SANCTIFICATION

We often talk about the role of grace in our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. We are justified not because we are such good boys and girls but because (as we learned last week) our sins are nailed to the cross. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

But, there is more. Not only are we saved (justified) by God's grace. We are also given a new way of life. We refer to this as sanctification. And this new way of life is not something that we can do on our own either. It is also a result of God's grace. We not only are saved by grace; we also live by grace.

That's why Paul in this passage connects the resurrection with holy living. The resurrection means that we are no longer bound by the ways of the world. We are freed to live in a way that reflects the glory of God.

In fact Paul tells us in our lesson for today that Christ is our life. Christ is everything to us. (3:4)

Is this true in your life? Is Christ everything to you?

WORLDLY VALUES

Sadly most of us know that this is not the case. What we say we believe and what we actually do are often

at odds. Faith and practice are often not in harmony. Despite our best efforts our beliefs and practices are often influenced more by the society around us than the example of Christ.

This was true for the Colossians as well. They lived in a world that was a mishmash of various philosophies and religions. It was a multicultural, multi-religious environment, and there were some who said that all religious truth was equally valid.

It was a world in which greed was rampant and influenced many decisions. It was a world in which sexual immorality was accepted as a normal part of life.

There were some in the Colossian church who wanted to compromise with the culture around them. They wanted to combine the Christian faith with the teachings of other religions. They wanted to accept sexual immorality as an optional lifestyle.

This letter was written long ago, but in some ways the situation doesn't seem all that different from the challenges that face the church today. Quite often it seems like the agenda in the church is being set not by God's word but by the world around us.

Jesus says that we should be the salt of the earth, but in many cases it seems like we have lost our saltiness. We are not an earthly demonstration of the kingdom of heaven. Instead we are a sanctimonious version of earthly values.

How can we retain our saltiness? How can we be who we are called to be? The key is found in what we allow into our lives.

WHAT ARE WE PUTTING IN?

There's a commercial on TV in which athletes are graphically portrayed as striving to do their best. A boxer slugs away at his opponent. A basketball player jumps to block a shot. A football player tackles a running back.

In each case the athletes stop to get a drink of Gatorade and when they sweat they sweat in color ... the same color as the Gatorade that they used to rehydrate! The idea of course is that we can perform better athletically if we drink Gatorade, and the punch line of the commercial is this: "Is it in you?"

I'm not so sure Gatorade can make us perform better athletically, but I do believe what is in us makes a

difference. We sometimes uncritically let things into our life that harm us.

For example, not too many years ago smoking was an accepted part of modern life. Movie stars smoked. When you went to a restaurant almost everyone in the place smoked as a part of his or her meal.

Now all that has changed. We know that smoking is bad for our health, and we have done things to limit smoking in public. We have come to understand that what is in us makes a difference. If we put the wrong things into our bodies we are harmed physically.

Paul is reminding the Colossians (and us) that the same is true when it comes to our spiritual life. There are some practices that harm us spiritually. What we put into our lives is important. And there are some things that need to be removed from our life so that we can be the people we are called to be in Christ Jesus.

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

And the first thing on Paul's list of things that harm us spiritually is sexual immorality. Throughout the Bible sexual immorality and unrestrained lust come in for particular criticism. In the ancient world not

only was sexual immorality condoned it was actually a part of many religions.

If some people today look upon Christianity as a prudish and “repressive” religion, the same thing could have been said in Paul’s day as well. Why does a call for sexual purity have such a high priority in the Christian church?

It is because the commitment a man and women make to each other in marriage is the basic building block of Christian community.

In the book of Genesis we read that marriage is a reflection of the very image of God. We were made for relationship, and when we are unfaithful to the commitments we have made, the long-term consequences for our spiritual health can be devastating.

Think of how many family problems, financial problems and even educational problems are due to the fact that a man and a woman did not live up to their commitment to each other in marriage. Can you imagine how society would be transformed if only we followed the Bible on this one aspect of life?

Remember that the Colossians were relatively new Christians. They grew up in a culture that condoned sexual immorality. And so they needed to be reminded that they were called in Christ to live in a different way.

In the same way we need to be reminded as well. Christ is risen! And that means the old way of life is dead and gone. Sexual immorality can no longer be condoned.

GREED

There is more that needs to die in our life. According to our passage for today, greed also needs to die because it is idolatry.

We are forever taking our gold and making it into a golden calf! Greed is not just a problem on Wall Street. It's also a problem on Main Street, and it's a problem in the church as well.

If we put our ultimate trust in money instead of God our theology will be distorted. Instead of trusting in resurrection power we will trust in the false God of Mammon.

There are many popular groups today that promote a so-called prosperity theology. I think that it is just a religious form of idolatry.

Jesus was very clear on this point. We shouldn't be worried about things. God will provide what we need, and that's all we need to know.

The gospel lesson from the lectionary this week is about a man who wants Jesus to settle an inheritance dispute. Jesus refuses.

Instead, Jesus tells a parable about man who had a banner year. He made so much money on a bumper crop that he decides to build bigger barns to store his newfound wealth. His goal in life is to eat, drink and be merry.

And what happens? That very night God reveals to him that his life will end. A bumper crop will not bring him salvation. What will he do with all that stuff at the end of his life?

The story ends with that question, and the implied question is what will we do with all that stuff at the end of our life? In the end greed is a false God that brings no salvation. If we fill our lives with things we have no room for God.

ANGER

The third thing that we need to get rid of in our life is “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.” Of course we will all become angry and say things that we shouldn’t say from time to time. But, the Christian life should not be dominated by anger.

I like the way Paul put it in his letter to the Ephesians, “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun do down on your anger, ...”

Last week we talked about the fact that many people think that their problems are always someone else’s fault. If we believe that not only will the sun set on our anger but many moons will set on our anger as well!

The only way to get rid of anger is to have the humility to acknowledge that part of the problem may be (and quite probably is) with us. We have to quit lying to one another (verse 9) and find the courage to tell ourselves the hard truth.

Our life is not what it should be. There are things in our life that we need to get rid of.

There is one common thread that ties together all of these things together. It is the call to be the body of Christ in the world. All of these sins tear down the community of faith. Sexual immorality, greed, anger and lying are all sins that divide us.

WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER?

But, it is the goal of God in Christ is to bring us together. We are to be a community in which there is (as Paul put it) “no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.”

The risen Christ lives in a community that puts off the old way of life and clothes itself with things like “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” (3:12)

Instead of filling ourselves with the ways of the world we are called to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. That means that we not only read about the love and forgiveness of God in Christ we also find ways to make that love and forgiveness a reality in our community of faith.

When we do this resurrection power becomes more than a theory. We come to know the power of the gospel. We are (as the Bible puts it) raised with Christ. (3:1)

LIVING THE WORD

The truth of the gospel becomes a practical truth that transforms our life together. The word translated “dwell” in verse 16 is related to the Greek word for home. We might say that the Word of God as revealed in Jesus needs to be at home in our lives.

We need to become comfortable and familiar with God’s word as revealed in Jesus. We need to let it become a part of our lives.

This means more than just reading the Bible or having daily devotions, though that is very important. The word of God as revealed in Jesus becomes a word that guides us.

Paul wrote, “let the peace of rule in your hearts.” We could translate this, “Let the peace of Christ be the umpire in your hearts.”

I like that old story about a baseball umpire who said, “There are balls and there are strikes; but they aren’t anything until I call’em.”

In an athletic contest the umpire has the final say. In the life of the Christian the word of God as revealed in Jesus has final say. When we are conflicted about difficult decisions, we turn to God’s word as revealed in Jesus. To coin a phrase, Jesus is the “decider” in the Christian life.

In this regard controversies in the church can actually become opportunities to let the Word of Christ dwell in us more richly. We are forced by the circumstances to listen carefully to God’s word and sometimes hear a word that often runs counter to the words being proclaimed in our society.

One of the first descriptions of Christian worship comes from Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia. He wrote, “They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God.”

That’s why we meet together today. We meet to remind each other of God’s Word as revealed in Jesus. We do it in the songs we sing, the stories we tell and the doctrines we teach.

In a world where “anything goes” we come together to drink from the flowing water of God’s Word which teaches us the way, the truth and the life. In a world that is filled with sin and death, God in Christ invites us to experience new life, resurrection life.

Paul tells us it’s like taking off an old set of clothes (the ways of the world) and putting on a new set of clothes (the ways of God’s love).

I invite you this morning to let the word of God dwell in you richly. Put off the old and put on the new. Fill you life with the things that are above and transform your life here and now.

Amen.