

August 4, 2013
Pentecost 11

"Set Your Heart on Christ Alone"

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.^[b] ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

This past week Steve Daugherty and I attended our synod convention in New Ulm, Minnesota. The theme for the convention was "In Christ Alone." The convention began with over 1000 people singing "In Christ Alone" in the beautiful new Chapel of the Christ. Sermons, hymns, essays and presentations constantly brought us back to the glorious truth that we are saved entirely by Christ alone. Our hope of being saved and being accepted by God does not depend on our performance but rather in what Christ our Savior has done for us.

In Christ alone- that is the theme of your life and mine. We are performance driven people. We know from experience that people will treat us with great love and respect if we show them greater love and respect. We are also wired to falsely believe that God will love us if we just do a better job of living up to what he expects of us. And then we crash and burn as we realize how far we actually fall short of what people expect of us and what we expect of ourselves and above all what God expects of us. We find ourselves crying out "God have mercy on me a sinner."

In the words we just read to you from Colossians we hear the clarion call to set our hearts on things above, on Christ alone, who is sitting at the right hand of God. I came home from the convention greatly uplifted in my faith because it was so focused on Christ as the source of my salvation. Let's look more closely at these words that call on us to set our hearts on our risen Lord and Savior.

Your position in Christ

Because you are performance driving you can never hear enough that Christ has done it all for you. "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." Notice it does not say that you will be raised with Christ or that you can be raised with Christ. It says you have been raised with

Christ. Christ's death and resurrection are actually your death and resurrection.

This is true for you because you are connected to Christ. He is the vine and we are the branches. When Jesus died on the cross, you died with Jesus. When he rose from the dead you also rose from the dead. Listen to these amazing words from Romans 6. "Or don't you know that that all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried by him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ as raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." The death of Jesus is yours through your baptism. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is yours through your baptism.

Because we are performance driven people we live with the daily reality of seeing how much we sin and fall short of God's glory. The other morning while at breakfast my wife read portions of an article on how you can be more efficient at getting things done. The article strongly recommended making a list of things you need to do and then check them off as you complete them. You feel a certain sense of accomplishment as you perform each task. All of us make mental lists on areas where we want to improve ourselves and do a better job at serving our God, following his commands and treating others with greater love and kindness. We are forever coaching ourselves to do better here and do better there. Always there is this sense of being incomplete and imperfect and far from what God expects of us. We feel the frustration expressed by King Solomon who wrote, "Meaningless, meaningless. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

Then we lift up our eyes to Jesus. We see him sitting seated at the right hand of God. He is sitting at the right hand of God because he completed the work of paying for our sin. Jesus cried out from the cross when he died, "It is finished!" The Father raised him from the dead to prove beyond any doubt that he accepted the payment Jesus made. As we see Jesus seated at the right hand of God we know the work is done. It is done perfectly just as God's creation was done perfectly. In the book of Hebrews it tells us that just as God rested from his work of creation when it was finished, so we can find our rest in what Jesus had done perfectly for us. We died and rose and now sit at the right hand with Jesus. We set our minds on things above, not on things below such as our daily performance.

Our lives are now hidden in Christ. "For you died and your life is now hidden in Christ." Other people do not see what you have in Christ. It is hidden to them. They see you struggling in life just as they do. They may even see you as someone who does not respect other people and serve God as you should. You have heard the stories of people buying old paintings at garage sales that are worth thousands of dollars. Your life may look like an old painting that is not worth very much, but your life is hidden in Christ. It is extremely valuable in Christ because it is connected to Christ.

"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." When Jesus returns in glory, he will make your true value and glory known. We look forward to that day when this hidden glory we have in Jesus will be fully revealed. The night before he died Jesus prayed for us to experience the glory he had with the Father from all eternity. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." 2 Corinthians 4 tells us, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

The convention this past week lifted us up to see that our salvation and hope of peace and forgiveness is in Christ alone. Because you and are in constant performance mode we need to preach this message to ourselves every day even every hour. "Your life is complete in Christ. Your life is where Christ is at the right hand of God. His death and his resurrection are your death and your resurrection." To be justified or declared not guilty means that our acceptance before God does not depend on our obedience or performance but on Christ's performance or perfect obedience for us. Set our hearts on Jesus. Set them on Christ alone. That's our hope of glory and that is also our hope for living a whole new life.

Your power in Christ

Jesus lived for you. Jesus loved you. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose for you. Jesus did it all for you. Now you have tremendous power in this completed work to live a new life to Jesus' honor and to the honor of the heavenly Father who raised him from the dead, and to the Holy Spirit who brought you to faith. "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

Put to death. That is a strong word. Have you ever see an animal that has been killed along the road? It does not take long for the animal killed along the road to start the process of decay. It does not take long for the vultures to swoop down and devour it. The Greek word used here has the thought of causing a body to become a dead body. With the power you have in Christ put to death the immoral and impure thoughts that rise up inside of you, that you see promoted by Hollywood and the internet. Put to death the greedy thoughts that might rise up inside of you when money becomes more important than it should be. Jesus had a good reason for telling us the story about a rich fool who built bigger barns and then foolishly said to himself: "You have plenty of goods things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

"You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." If you did not see Jesus sitting at the right hand of God for you, you would still enjoy walking in the ways of this world. Now things are different for you. Jesus gives you the desire and the power to say no to sinful actions that can lead you away from him. "But now you must rid yourselves of such things as these; anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips."

When we were camping in Colorado on the Grand Mesa above Grand Junction, there were lots of mosquitoes. One mosquito got into the tent. Before we went to sleep we made it our mission to get rid of that one mosquito, because you know after you fall asleep it is going to find a way to stick its long probe into your skin, inject blood thinner and then engorge itself on your blood. It was not easy, but we were able to get that mosquito.

So it is with sin. Into the tent of your life come things that really can mess up your life such as anger, rage, malice and slander. Have you ever been anger, or carried or grudge or even said bad things about other people? You know how these sins can hurt other people and even destroy your life and make it miserable. Jesus, our glorious Savior, sitting at the right hand of God gives you the power to get rid of sin. You don't want filthy language to come from your lips. You don't want to tell lies or be dishonest in way you

interact with people. Get rid of the old clothes of sin and put on the new person you are in Christ with the power he gives you. "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge in the image of its Creator." When you walk through poison oak, you need to put off the clothes that are full of poison oak and put on new clothes so it does not spread all over your body. Jesus helps us put off the old and put on the new.

"In Christ alone." That was the theme of our convention this past week. That is the theme of your life as you constantly look at who you are in Christ and then find in him the power to live a whole new life. Amen.