

Pentecost 12
August 7, 2016

"Thumbs Up! Your Life Is Hidden in Christ!"

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 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. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must 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 Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Imagine for a moment that you are watching a race at the Special Olympics. A young man crosses the finish line with a big smile on his face. Does he raise his arms in victory? Does he flash the victory sign with two fingers on each hand? No, he looks over to his mom and dad and gives them a "thumbs up." The thumbs up sign is a way of communicating to others that everything is OK, even more than OK. It is great!

When you think of it, the thumbs up sign could be sign for the Christian faith. For you see we have the ultimate victory not in ourselves but in Christ Jesus our Savior. Romans 8 says we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Martin Luther said, "A Christians is always an optimist."

In these amazing words we just read to you, we hear that we have already been raised with Christ and our lives are hidden in Christ. We are with Jesus at the right hand of his heavenly Father. We can give a "thumbs up" because the victory is already ours. Because your life is hidden in Christ at the right hand of God you have a wonderful position in life right now and you have the power to live a whole new life before the Lord calls you home to heaven.

Thumbs up for the position that we share

Have you ever noticed that some people in this congregation sit in their own special places every Sunday morning? But all of you share a very special position because you are sitting right now where Christ is at the right hand of the heavenly Father. Do you want proof for this? Look at the words we read to you again. "Since, then, then you have been raised with Christ, set you hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on heavenly things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is not hidden in Christ."

These words are truly amazing. They tell us that we have been raised with Christ. Notice the use of the past tense. It does not say we will be raised with Christ, it says we already are raised with Christ. It says you have died. Yes you died with Christ. You were raised to life with Christ. You sit with Christ at the right hand of the heavenly Father. This is a position you enjoy right now even

when you are sitting in different places in worship and going through various struggles in life.

Yes, you died with Christ. Normally you associate death with something negative. There are times though we death is something positive, very positive. For example if some deadly germ enters your body and your immune system attacks this germ and destroys it, that is something positive. Sin as entered your life and mine. It has messed up our lives and made us unacceptable to God and will lead to eternal death and punishment. Jesus killed that sin by taking it do the cross. Two weeks ago we heard these words from Colossians 2, "God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; nailing it to the cross." Our sin died with Jesus. Through faith in him we are connected to his death, his burial, his resurrection and his sitting at the hand of heavenly Father. Our life is hidden in him.

The dear Christians in Colosse were being told it was not enough to look to Jesus for their forgiveness and their peace with God. False teachers said they needed to add things to what Christ had done to make it genuine and real such as feelings or emotions, inner mystical experiences, and keeping Old Testament laws. Do you see how dangerous this is? If I start looking into myself I will immediately come face to face with what I failure I am in doing what is right. Martin Luther tried to do this. He wrote in one hymn, "Yea, deep and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me."

In his book *Christ Esteem* Don Matzat describes the day he became profoundly aware of his own weakness and depth of depravity within his own heart. It happened when he had a flash of anger inside of his heart because his infant daughter would not let them get any sleep at night. He wrote, "Thus began an eye-opening process of self-knowledge. After numerous other less-dramatic experiences, I came to the conclusion that given the right circumstances, I was capable of anything." We have seen these flashes of anger more than once in our lives. I truly frightens us and scares us and leaves us trembling.

But then Matzat goes on to write how much comfort he found in these words from Colossians that we died with Christ, were raised with Christ, and now sit with Christ Jesus our Lord at the right hand of the Father. "After a few minutes the thought hit me, 'If in God's eyes you ascended into the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, then as far as God is concerned, you are not even here. You are where Jesus is.'" So I look out at you who believe in Christ Jesus your Savior. I can see you sitting your favorite places. But I also see you sitting where Jesus is at the right hand of the heavenly Father.

Yes, your life is hidden in him. It is hidden because it can only be seen through eyes of faith. It is hidden in him because it is protected and safe. Hebrews 6:19 says, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters into the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus is, who went before us, who has entered on our behalf." In the Old Testament the priest went behind the curtain or veil of the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the top of mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. This foreshadowed Jesus going into the presence of God to offer his blood as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. It says that Jesus is behind that veil. He is with his heavenly Father with every sin paid for and nothing held against him. That's the anchor for the soul. That is why we sing in the hymn, "My anchor holds with the veil."

Your eyes of faith see something that people don't see unless they are brought to saving faith in Christ. The night of his resurrection Jesus told Thomas and the other disciples, "Because you have seen me you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So we give each other the thumbs up because of the position we have with Christ at the right hand of God the Father.

Someday we will see this position clearly as we shine with Jesus in glory. As Paul writes, "When Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory." You don't have to wait till Jesus comes in clouds of glory to give a thumbs up about living and reigning with him. This position is already yours. I cannot tell you enough what an honor it is to be with people who died with Christ, who have been raised to life with him, and who are now sitting at the right hand of God with him. I think if I were preaching in a Baptist church, I would probably hear a few people shouting out praise the Lord, or alleluia, or keep going preacher. That's their way giving a thumbs up. Paul encourages us to set our hearts on things above. In the daily grind of this week remember the position you now have.

Thumbs up for the power that we share

This glorious position you now have with Jesus gives you power to survive the struggles with sin that still face your life before the Lord calls you home to heaven. Listen to how Paul speaks about the privilege of putting to death evil things that pop up in our lives. "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry." The dear Christians in Colosse had to struggle with sins that could still pop up from their past lives. They once gave themselves over to immoral thoughts and behavior. Everything around them told them to give into their passions and desires whether it was in sexual things or in material things. Has life changed much today? Even a person like Stephen Hawkings bemoans how people have become more greedy in the last ten years.

The Greek word for putting something to death is nekrosis. The word is still used today to describe decaying flesh on a human body. It is a strong word. But it is a good word. I think of the cockroach on the floor in my apartment in Phoenix during my intern year. I threw a shoe at it, hit it head on, and killed it. As you live in the power of Jesus' living, loving, dying and rising just for you, you enjoy seeing sin being put to death in your life. You enjoy the power to live a whole new life that says no to sin. Think of the power that comes to say no to your selfish desire and the strength to say yes to showing kindness and consideration to others.

Paul joyfully encourages the Christians in Colosse to get rid of anger, malice, slander, and filthy language from their lips. He encourages all of us to not lie to each other, to throw off the old self and to put on the new self, the new person we are in Christ Jesus our Savior. This new self is constantly being renewed in the image of its Creator. Adam and Eve lost the image of God in creation. Their lives no longer matched the perfect life of their creator. In Christ and the power we have in him from our new position in him we can see our lives become closer and closer to what life was like in the original Garden of Eden. Just think of how Jesus' love for you has enabled you to bring forth fruits of love and kindness to people all around you, but especially those in your own family. As we struggle together to live for Jesus we constantly give thumbs up for the progress we are making together in the Lord.

Look at the fellow believers who are running this race of life with you. They all need your encouragement. They need your smiles. They need the thumbs up that rejoices in the position you have in Christ and the power you have in him. Each one is important. We are the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." Together, here in this place, we have seen our lives hidden in Christ. This is certainly a good reason to give a thumbs up. Amen.