

**Easter Sunday
April 16, 2017**

"Raised with Christ"

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

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.

Last Sunday two very good friends, Justin Rose and Sergio Garcia, battled to the last hole in the famed Masters Tournament of golf in Augusta Georgia. It seemed like Justin was going to win, but then Sergio made a comeback. The camera caught Justin turning to his friend and giving him a thumbs up for his amazing performance. You have given the thumbs up more than once in your life, I'm sure. The server asks, "How was the meal?" Before you even speak, you give the thumbs up.

On this Easter morning we give a thumbs up to Jesus for what he accomplished by giving his life for us to take the punishment for our sin and then raising himself to life again. We are all smiles as we joyfully greet each other with the words, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Jesus' victory is also our victory. His resurrection is also our resurrection. That's the point we want to see in the words we just read. We can give each other a thumbs up because miraculously we are also raised with Christ.

We are participants in Jesus' resurrection

You see dear Christians we are not just spectators of Christ's resurrection, we are participants. Listen again to these amazing words, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." It says that you have been raised with Christ. That same important truth is taught in Ephesians chapter 2 where it says, "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ." So instead of only being thrilled observers of the Jesus' resurrection, we through our faith in Christ have actually been raised with Christ and we are seated with him at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms.

How is this possible? It is through the miracle of faith and the blessing of your baptism. Romans chapter six says, "Or don't you know that all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Then it goes on to say these amazing words. "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

Why are you a participant in Jesus' resurrection and not only a spectator of this great event? Jesus made it so simple and so clear to you when he said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." You are so closely connected to Christ that you share in his resurrection. The Bible says that Jesus is the head of the church and we are his body. If the head rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God then the body is also already there. We are living stones in his church built on him the living Stone. Jesus is alive. He has risen just as he said. We are raised with him.

So we listen to these words and take them to heart when it says, "Set your heart on things above" and "Set your mind on things above, not only earthly things." Oh, it is certainly OK to enjoy things on this earth that the Lord gives us. We can enjoy the homes we live in, and the clothes we wear, and the food we eat at our Easter brunch. There are so many blessings we are given from the bountiful hand of our God for which we thank and praise him. But our real, solid, sure, eternal, lasting joy is found in this fact that we are already raised with Christ. With the eyes of faith we see him sitting at the right hand of God and we are there with him already right now, even though we have lots of struggles and problems in life.

Could it be possible that our lives become so taken up with what's going on all around us and inside of us that we lose touch with the fact we have been raised with Christ? Let a story from the life of Albert Einstein help us. The famous Albert Einstein was riding on a train. The conductor came to him and asked for his ticket. He fumbled through his pockets but couldn't find the ticket. The conductor said, "Mr. Einstein, it's OK. I know who you are, everyone knows who you are." Still he kept looking for his ticket. The conductor smiled and said, "Mr. Einstein, I know who you are." Finally, Einstein said, "So do I young man, but I need my ticket because I don't know where I am going." The brilliant mind of Mr. Albert Einstein was so full of thoughts and ideas that he lost track of where he was going.

You are no Einstein and neither am I, yet our minds can become so full of things here on this earth, we don't have time to set our minds on things above. And yes, our minds can become so full of things that aren't that all important we lose touch with who we are in Christ and the reality that we have been raised with Christ. The book of Hebrews tells us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" who "sat down on the right hand of the throne of God." He is our Head and we are his body. He is the Vine and we are the branches. We are where he is. We give a thumbs up to Jesus for raising himself from the dead and thumbs up to each other because we have been raised with him.

We are participants in Jesus' death

Not only are we raised to life with Christ through faith in him, we also died with him. "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." When Jesus died, you died with him. Again we turn to Romans 6 where it says, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Our baptism and our faith connect us to Jesus' death for our sin. When we see Jesus being put to death on the cross we are not just spectators. We can look at Jesus and say, "I was put to death on the cross when Jesus died. He took my sin upon himself. He paid for it and he put it to death so it cannot destroy me on the last day."

Earlier in this letter Paul wrote about the physical body of Jesus and his death that reconciles us to God by removing our sin. "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you to himself by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." We were alienated from God because of our evil behavior. We were enemies of God because of the way we lived our lives.

I don't have to go very far in my life even on this Easter morning to see evidence of evil behavior and sin. It is everywhere. It condemns me. It means I have no hope. But then we see Jesus being raised from the dead after he paid the price for my sin and died with the words, "It is finished!" If only a small part of our evil behavior was not forgiven by Jesus, the Father who is perfect and holy would not have raised his Son to life again. We are connected to that death and burial and resurrection. That means we are reconciled to our God and have peace with our God. The trash of your sin and mine has been buried with Christ. No one can dig it up again and hold them against us.

It also says because you are part of Christ's death and resurrection your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Imagine if these coins were real gold. You certainly would want to hide these coins in a safe place. Because of what Jesus did for you in his death and resurrection, your life, your beautiful life in Christ, pure and clean and holy is now hidden with God in Christ. The love and the peace and the forgiveness you have in Christ is safe and secure.

Romans 8 begins with the verse there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ and ends with worlds that nothing will separate us from his life. Our life is hidden in him. This is more real to us than anything else in life. We give a thumbs up to Jesus' death and burial that buried our sins. We give a thumbs up to each other because we have been justified, that means declared not guilty, and that is the best news you will ever hear.

We will be part of the resurrection on the last day

We have not yet exhausted all the comfort and joy these verses have to offer us this morning. Notice again verse 4 with its emphasis that we will be raised to life again when Jesus returns in glory again on the last day. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." It says Christ is our life. When we die we actually continue to live. Our souls go to be with Jesus. Stephen prayed as he was dying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." Jesus gave life to the dying thief when he said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The people we love who have died in Jesus are living and reigning with Christ. "Christ is our life."

There will also be a resurrection of the body on the last day when Jesus returns. Jesus will raise us to life again with glorified bodies. It says, "Then you will appear with him in glory." Jesus prayed so fervently that people like you and me who believe in him might see his glory and the glory of the place he has prepared for us. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory I had with you before the world began." You believe in Jesus and you have the hope that someday you will be raised to life again. You and your loved ones who died in Jesus will not be spectators when Jesus returns, you will be participants. 1 Thessalonians 4 says, "For the Lord himself will

come down from heaven with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

As we face the daily problems and struggles of life we know the best is yet to come. We will appear with Jesus in glory with glorified bodies. A few years ago I was visiting with my mother when she and Dad were still alive. We had such good talks together in their living room. She was telling me about attending the funeral of her close friend Lorraine. Lorraine was short but she married a tall man and had four sons who were tall like their dad and they loved to eat and she loved to cook. She was famous for her desserts. She talked about Lorraine and then said, “There was something strange about her funeral. When we went to the viewing before the service, I noticed they had placed a silver fork in her folded hands. That seemed strange to me.” I laughed and said, “Mom, you mean you haven’t heard that story about the family that buried their mom with a fork in her hand?” She hadn’t. I can still see the smile on her face when I explained to her how those boys who loved their mom’s cooking and desserts grew up hearing her say as the plates were being cleared, “Now keep your forks.” They knew that meant the best was coming, the dessert was on its way. They buried their mom with a silver fork in her hand, knowing the best was yet to come when Jesus raises her to life again on the last day. That’s the sure hope we have as Christians.

Today we give thumbs up to Jesus and to each other. We have the victory because we are participants in his resurrection, we are participants in his death and burial of our sin, and we will be participants in the resurrection on the last day. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.