

Easter People
Meditation on Col. 3:1-4 and John 20:1-18
Easter Sunday 2017
Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." 'Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:1-18)

Thank you all for your prayers for my mom this week! Mom fell Monday night and was taken by ambulance to a hospital in Orange City. We visited her there on Wednesday after she had surgery to repair a broken hip. Although she dozed on and off for the hours we were with her, when she was awake, she had to be my mother. She told me I needed to rest more and stop doing so much. That I was “pale” and looked tired. It was Holy Week, and I was preparing the service for Maundy Thursday on my laptop in her hospital room. I had to smile at my 78-year-old mom telling me to stop doing so much. It was the pot calling the kettle black! The day she fell, she had been out for hours with friends having lunch at the Daytona State College culinary school cafe, at least a 30-minute drive from her home. I am sure she had already swam laps that morning, made or received 5 to 10 phone calls, and took care of Dad. Did I mention she works part time preparing people’s taxes, sings in her church choir and plays bridge every week?

But she was right. I *was* tired--hadn’t slept well the night before, thinking about her surgery and the long recovery ahead. I wondered how my dad would do with her at the hospital and then rehab--when he would be on his own. I felt like this great weight was on my shoulders. And then, on the way out of the hospital that evening, we stumbled upon the chapel! We saw a beautiful stained glass window with the tree of life. When, in Genesis, God made human beings in His image and called them “good.” People had shared their thoughts and prayers on cards, writing of their own value in God’s eyes and their testimonies of healing. On the wall was a verse from Revelation 21:1-7. The passage is the vision of the “new heaven and new earth” and the holy city, the “new

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,' a bride adorned for her husband. When ⁴ Christ will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ ... "See, I am making all things new." And ...⁶ ..."It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ ...and I will be their God and they will be my children."

I was drawn to the chapel's large wooden cross, draped with white cloth--symbolizing the Resurrection. And the weight I had been feeling on my shoulders began to lift. I felt the presence of the Spirit and joy touched my heart. I was reminded, looking up at the cross, that even Easter People, those who believe with all their heart in Jesus' work on the cross for our sakes, his dying and his rising-- can get drawn into the worries, problems and fears of this world. But then--we look up! Our hope is ALWAYS in Him! Answers to all of life's questions lie at the foot of the cross. Our lives are hidden in Him--and waiting to be revealed--by the one who is ALIVE forever and coming again! Hallelujah! Amen!

The message of Paul to the Colossians is this--that we who believe on Christ's resurrection and have been baptized, have *already been raised with him*; this happened in our baptism so that we would *live new lives in Him*. As Paul writes to the Galatians in 2:20, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Paul, in Colossians, says our lives are "hidden in Christ." Isn't that beautiful? This intimacy speaks of His love

for us and our protection and security. Nothing can harm a soul hidden in Christ! Paul goes on to say that now that we are baptized, “Christ is our life,” sounding very much like when he writes to the Philippians in 1:21, saying, “For me, to live is Christ.” Paul is saying there’s nothing more important to him than Jesus Christ. Therefore, professing faith in Jesus and being baptized isn’t the “end all” to being a Christian, as some might think. This is just the beginning of something *new*, something God has planned and God only knows, something *good*, as Paul says in Philippians 1:6, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a *good* work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

Our Colossians reading provides instructions on living the Christian life. “Seek the things that are above,” he says, “where Christ is.” “Don’t fix your thoughts,” he says, on the things of the earth. He repeats for emphasis, “Set your mind on the things that are above.” Reading beyond the lectionary verses, we discover that Paul isn’t arguing for the Christian to withdraw from all activities and responsibilities in this world to simply contemplate God. He is talking about changing our attitudes and behavior so that others can see Christ in us. This doesn’t just happen automatically when we become a Christian. It is something *we do with the Spirit*. But before we can live as Christ, we have to “put to death” what is “earthly,” such as “greed,” “idolatry,” “evil desire” and “fornication.” He says, “get rid of anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.” “Don’t lie to one another,” he says. Then, Paul reminds us *who we are, in spite of our sin*. Isn’t that amazing? We are, because of God’s love and grace, “God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved.” Therefore, we must “*clothe ourselves* with compassion, kindness,

humility, meekness and patience.” “Bear with one another,” he says, “and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you.” And, “above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Christ’s followers let Christ’s peace “rule in their hearts.” They are “thankful” and allow the word of Christ to dwell in them richly. They “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom”; and they gather to worship and praise the Lord, singing “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God”, “with gratitude in (their) hearts.” And whatever we do, “in word or deed” we do in the name of the Lord Jesus, “giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Yesterday, our congregation hosted an “Eggstravaganza” to share the love of Christ with our community. We had many faithful volunteers -- leading children to make crafts, decorate cookies like Easter eggs, play games, plant seeds, and eat hot dogs and chips. And then we had 2 egg hunts, one for preschoolers and the other for older kids. You know, some churches might be critical of our light-hearted, bunny and chick-themed crafts and games. They might say our Eggstravaganza wasn’t religious enough.

But watching the families interact with volunteers and one another, laughing, hugging, meeting new people, making new friends, and sharing stories, I saw the love and grace of Jesus Christ. I saw Easter People-- whose minds were not fixed on earthly things, but were fixed

on things above-- building God's Kingdom, loving one another as Christ loves us. I saw God's "chosen ones, holy and beloved" seeking to draw others closer to Christ and live new lives hidden in the one who is ALIVE forever--and coming again! Hallelujah! Amen!

Let us pray. Holy One, we praise you and thank you for Your Son, Jesus, and His willingness to be obedient to you to the point of dying on a cross. Thank you for the witness of the disciples and for Mary, especially, who stayed at the empty tomb, meeting the angels and the risen Christ. Help us, Lord, to be faithful Easter People, trusting you during times of struggle, sorrow and pain. Heal our loved ones, who are sick. Comfort and give peace and patience to their caregivers. Keep us coming back to the foot of the cross, when we are weary or discouraged, so that we might find answers to all of our questions. Thank you for raising Jesus from the dead and the promise that we, too, are and shall be raised with and hidden in Him who is ALIVE forever--and coming again! Hallelujah! Amen.