

The Hidden Life

Colossians 3:1-11

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

July 31, 2016 – Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In this morning's epistle St. Paul has penned these words: "For you *died*, and your life is *hidden* with Christ in God." Hear these words again. "You *died*, and your life is *hidden* with Christ in God." Now, that's a pretty unusual way of thinking about things, wouldn't you agree? What do you suppose Paul meant by this statement? How is it possible that you – in a very real sense – may have already died? And, if that's true, how could that be a good thing?

Well, let me ask you this. Have you ever heard someone say: "My life is over"? What does such a statement mean? Is it possible that sometime during your life you may also have said or thought the very same thing yourself? What a terrible thing it is when a person actually comes to believe their life is over! Of course such words could only be spoken in a time of great grief or sorrow. Most generally they would only come from the lips of someone who was experiencing the depths of anguish or despair – whose heart had been broken by the disappointment of living in a broken, dying world. When someone is pushed to the point of believing their life is over, it probably means they feel they've lost everything important. And often that person truly *does* believe they no longer have anything to live for.

For someone whose confidence and hope are vested in the things of this world, this is really the only expression that truly fits their understanding of reality. For in the final analysis, any hope based upon the things of this world is going to result in the realization that there is *nothing* left upon which one's hope can be anchored. As King Solomon wrote in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." How sad life must be for those who chase after the things of this world – things which will ultimately and absolutely perish and disappear – things which, by nature, have no choice but to disappoint and lead to despair.

But for you, dear Christian, the statement: "My life is over," ought to mean something entirely different. Indeed, according to St. Paul, such a statement is not the end, but rather the beginning of the new life. For in a very real sense, *your* life *is* over – that is, the life which relied entirely upon you – that life which found it's identity in who you are and what you do, "For you died, and your life is now *hidden* with Christ in God."

With these words St. Paul reveals a blessed truth that can only be seen with the eyes of faith. When Paul says your life is over, he means your life in connection with this world of sin and death is over. Any reason you might have for living in gloom and despair has been crucified and buried. Every false hope in meaningless things has been washed away in the flood of your Baptism. Your life here in this world – a life which *would* have ended in death were it left up to you – is now over. Now you have a new life in connection with Christ. In Him, you have already died to this world, to sin, and to death. The meaninglessness of life here in this fallen world no longer has any power over you. In other words, you are dead to the world. "You have died, and your life is now *hidden* with Christ in God."

You, dear Christian – you have been given a new life by God. Your life is no longer your own, but in Christ who purchased and won you from the power of sin, death, and the devil. He is the One who laid down His life in exchange for yours. He is the One who died so that you might have life in connection with Him through Baptism – that Baptism in which God has put you to death regarding the things of death – and in which He raised you to life regarding the things of life which are *hidden* in Christ – freely given to you by grace, through faith.

Consider what it means to be dead. Isn't death most simply defined as a separation of sorts? What I mean is that when you die you are separated from your life here in this world. Another term people use to describe dying is the word, "expire." A person "expires" because they've breathed out their last breath. Quite simply, a person who dies is separated from life. When Adam and Eve sinned, they became separated from the love of God – and consequently they died. Since then, all of mankind has been living in a state of separation from God by virtue of that separation which occurred when our first parents turned aside from the One who alone is life. For to be cut off from God *is* to be cut off from life.

But *you* – Paul tells us – *you* have been cut off from the way of death and restored to life in God with Christ. Even as Christ died to the world and was raised to life, so also, *with Him*, you have been put to death to the world and raised to life in God. Through Baptism your life has been permanently connected with Christ, who is our life. And this new life can only be seen in those things which are connected with Christ. You can't see it

by looking to the things of this world – for to be sure, this world knows only death, destruction and despair. Again, listen to the words of St. Paul: “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 minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now *hidden* with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

Paul here is teaching something we’d never be able to figure out on our own. If your life is *hidden* with Christ in God, that means that there is no way you can see this life by looking at what’s visible around you. Instead, Paul explains, you must set your heart on things above if you are to every have any hope of holding steadfast to the promise of eternal life. “Put to death, therefore,” Paul tells us, “whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge and image of its Creator.”

If you want to understand this new life that’s been given to you in Christ, you first have to understand that this new life is entirely separate from the life and ways of the world. You have to realize that in Baptism God sets His children apart unto Himself and restores them to the true knowledge of the image of God that’s been freely bestowed on them by faith in the life and merit of our Savior. Scripture informs us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them – including man. After He finished His creative work God surveyed all He had made and pronounced it to be good – very good!

But then something ugly happened. God’s beautiful creation was decimated by sin. Satan disobeyed God and led a third of the holy angels into rebellion against the Creator. God threw them out of heaven – but then they came into our world and brought that rebellion with them. Eve fell victim to their evil scheme and led her husband with her into the way of death. God’s curse – which belongs on all who separate themselves from the Lord of life – then fell upon the entire earth – leaving nothing but pain, suffering, and death in its wake.

Amazingly, however, that curse wasn’t the final word from God, for our Lord is a merciful God. He desires not the death and destruction of man – rather He desires life and salvation for all. Sadly, however, those who choose to remain in their rebellious ways are dead

to the mercy of God and cannot see it. Only through faith in Christ can a person be renewed in the knowledge and image of his Creator. And again, I might add, it’s absolutely impossible to see any of this by looking to the things of this earthly existence. When you look to such things all you’ll ever see is the curse God pronounced against sin. Your life is not – and cannot – be found in the things of this world. “For you died, and your life is now *hidden* with Christ in God.”

My dear brothers and sisters, do you want to see yourself as God sees you? Then set your heart and mind on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Don’t look to yourself or to your own good works. All you’ll find there is failure, sin, doom, and despair. Don’t look to yourself, your family, your job – or to *anything* else connected with this world. Remember, your life is not of this world. Your life is *hidden* with Christ in God. Look to God, who raised Christ from the dead. He is the One who took your sin upon Himself because there was nothing you could do about it. He is the One who died in your place and was raised to life in order that in Him you might have true life once again. On account of your sinful nature you were once separated from life in God. But in Baptism God has renewed you in His image – and restored you to life through connection with Him.

In order to keep you in that true faith – where your heart will continually be set on things above – where Christ, who is your Life, is seated at the right hand of God – our Lord established His holy Church here on this earth. Every time you gather together in the name of Jesus, Christ is once again joining you into His body and showing you your life with Him in God. Here is where He reveals to you the things of heaven which have been reserved for you until the Last Day – that Day when you’ll finally be able to see all things fully and completely. Until that great and mighty Day, however, God has placed you into the Communion of His saints – who are part of the Holy Christian Church on earth.

In this Holy Christian Church God has united you with all the saints of all time – and in this assembly of saints He has allowed you to catch a glimpse of the heavenly glory which is yours with Christ in God. Here – gathered together around Word and Sacrament – you see that which cannot otherwise be seen. In this way God deigns to gather you to Himself, to draw you away from the world, and to separate you from the way of death – all so that you might share in the life which belongs to those who remain in the true faith until the end. God grant that your heart and mind might always stay steadfastly fixed upon this life that’s now yours through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. To Him alone be the glory. Amen.