

July 31, 2016  
Sermon for The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Colossians 3:1–11

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Colossians 3:1–11 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Forty-seven years ago this past week, it was the biggest news on earth. But this summer, last Sunday, I bet it slipped by without you even noticing it. It slipped past me.

As important as it was—and still is, really—it's easy to forget.

On July 24, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Mike Collins returned safely to earth after man's first moon landing four days earlier, and they were the talk of the whole world!

A wide world tour with parades and speeches and endless television coverage awaited them. For a brief time, the entire human race was on the same page, together looking beyond the wars and distrust and economic worries down here to gaze at and dream about something way up above.

But how quickly we all come back to earth.

As Christians, though living in this fallen world, we have things above to which we can always look—and *we're not just talking about heaven*. Unlike the world's focus on the moon forty-seven years ago, our focus as Christians isn't primarily on a place.

Our looking to things above is looking to a person, Jesus Christ. That means we can look to things above every day, not just for the then and there, but also for the here and now.

When we forget that, we forfeit so much of the joy God intends for us already today. In our text this morning, therefore, St. Paul encourages us to keep seeking the things above—where Jesus is.

Look forward to your glory above to be revealed in Christ (vv 1–4).

The whole point of the Letter to the Colossians is that Christ is the whole point.

Heresies and false teachings had been distracting the Church there from Christ—to worldly things: Jewish legalism or empty human philosophies.

Paul responds by putting Christ in the appropriate place; above all such things (v 1).

Paul also tells us to seek things that emanate from where Christ is—at the right hand of God.

Christ came to be seated at God's right hand after one giant leap for mankind.

First came His leap from heaven to live among us down here on planet earth; not because He had to, but out of love for us.

Then all those small steps as a man that included perfect keeping of the Law to the tiniest degree, every jot and tittle, which culminated in those pained, trudging, stumbling steps to the cross. (Mt 5:17-18)

And finally that huge leap from the grave to His resurrection and ascension back to heaven, one Man going where now every man and woman and child can go.

That's our destiny now too—to be with God.

By our Baptism, we died to this world and have been raised to heaven (v 3a).

Baptism symbolizes that earthly things, including our sinful flesh, have been drowned and that a new heavenly man or woman has risen from the water.

Baptism truly creates faith in Christ, and all who believe have a place in heaven without even the smallest step on their own parts.

The challenge is to remain focused above (v 2).

Some of you can probably remember where you were on July 20, 1969. The day Neil Armstrong took his famous "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind," man's first step on the moon. Most of the world watched on television, holding its collective breath, understanding full well what a historic moment this was. Being that it was around 10 p.m. (10:56 p.m. EDT) and I was about 21/2 years old, I was probably already in bed.

It's easy for us to get so tied up in things down here on earth—jobs and school and romances and mortgages—that we forget about things above, the things that really matter. St.

Paul encourages us instead to “*set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*” (Col 3:2) because Christ takes care of all things, both forever and now, both in heaven and on earth.

It’s easy to forget things above when so much here presses hard against us. When we’re unemployed, we don’t feel very heavenly. It’s tough to think about the eternal future when you’ve got bills now.

When you’re sick, perhaps seriously, heaven isn’t necessarily what you want to think about.

When you’re young and prospering—the family’s growing, the career’s taking off—spiritual blessings don’t seem to glitter as brightly as earthly ones.

For now, the heavenly things are hidden (v 3b). It’s easy just to go with the flow and give in to the earthly. That is what is on our minds, right now because we are in the thick of it.

However, Paul reminds us that the things of this world are not what life is about. Our life *is* Christ (v 4a)!

No matter how much the world screams for our attention, our life is in Christ! Even while in this world, it’s the things above, from where Christ is, those are the things that count. They are always good and always in rich supply.

But one day the glory of those things above will be revealed for us, when we will be with Christ (v 4). Now we are talking about heaven.

At that moment, everyone will see just how unimportant the things we’ve been stressing about down here—how short have been the months of unemployment, the years of pain, how fleeting the material successes.

However things of our lives on this earth treat us, we can always look forward to that greatest, eternal life above, going to be where Christ is.

Of course, some would say that’s just another moonshot. “Christianity offers some good stuff in the ‘sky’, but what’s it good for down here?”

And you know, even forty-one years ago, there were people who opposed the space program, saying it's irrelevant to life on earth. Well, St. Paul certainly is pointing us to things above, but setting our minds on things above has everything to do with the way we live now.

The rest of our text encourages us today to live above earthly things—because Christ isn't in the earthly things (vv 5–11).

Living the life of things above is something we should be doing now. It's like an unborn baby: It's not a "potential life" or a "life-to-be." He or she is a life in the fullest sense, but just can't be seen yet but a full and complete living person right now!

We are living the life of things above right now, ever since our Baptism. We just can't yet see them fully. The world and its trappings cloud our heavenly view. So we're called to make that life as visible as possible, to be different from lives lived for things below.

Paul lists a host of sins that reflect what is earthly: "*sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. . . . Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. . . . Do not lie*" (vv 5b, 8b, 9a).

Each of these is a gratification of some earthly desire—sex, greed, selfish ego; things that we selfishly want for our own sinful satisfaction. We are not above such sins, but we are to abstain from them. By the Holy Spirit's power, we can rise above them.

As Christians, we have wonderful reason to be different from a life of all these: Christ is above them! We are to seek the things above, where Christ is.

Christ isn't in that kind of behavior. We come up with all sorts of rationalizations as to why it is ok, but we are only lying to ourselves.

We are now in Christ, being renewed in His image (vv 9–10).

The life of things above, then, means living the very opposite of earthly, for-oneself desires, but rather living in harmony with and service to all others (v 11).

On earth we think about ourselves and all we can grab.

Above, with Jesus, we'll be joined together with people of all races, backgrounds, social strata—with all who also have been seeking the true One from above, Christ Jesus.

Living that life now, therefore, we'll eagerly look to serve all others. We put time and money into outreach programs like VBS and midweek school. We volunteer for programs like the Texas Ramp project. All of the churches in our Circuit send dollars and volunteers into South America for our Circuit Vision Project.

We could go on and on. Some services to others remain unknown. Fixing a neighbor's mover, or cutting their grass, changing a light bulb, giving a ride.

I certainly can't pretend that I always set my mind on things above, any more than I consider every day what an amazing thing it was for us to put a man on the moon.

But tell me the truth: Have you ever harbored a secret desire to go into space? Maybe to the moon? As Christians, we're destined to go farther. We've been raised with Christ. Now that's something to keep in mind. Our salvation, our eternity is assured in the forgiveness won in Christ Jesus.

Your sins are forgiven. You have life eternal, all for the sake of Christ. Keep seeking the things above. Through baptism in Christ, they are yours!  
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.