

*Raised with Christ*

**Colossians 3:1-4**

John Breon

The heart of the good news is that Jesus died and was raised to life for us—to set us free from sin and death and all evil powers. He died and rose again in our place, but also as our example. Death and resurrection are the pattern for life in Christ. We die to sin and to any way of life apart from God. We are raised up to new life in and with Jesus, to walk in newness of life.

One preacher says that when you've been raised from the dead, you're different. You don't look the same, act the same, or sound the same. We can talk about that, but what does that change look like? He says that puzzled him when he was baptized just a couple of weeks short of his fourteenth birthday. The pastor who baptized him used this passage from Colossians that we're looking at today. He says that as he walked home after that service he tried to think what it meant.

You know, after you've been raised from the dead, you don't look the same, sound the same, talk the same, do the same. But what do you do? How do you talk? What do you sound like?

I went to school Monday morning thinking, *Is anybody going to know that I've been raised? Should I dress up a little better from what I've been dressing? It wouldn't hurt. Do I talk another way? Do I throw in a verse of scripture now and then? What do I do at ball practice? Are they going to say, "Well, looks like he's been raised from the dead?"* How do you talk? How do you walk? How do you relate? (Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories* 92-93)

In the section surrounding the passage we've read, the apostle Paul is helping a group of Christians see what this new life looks like. He talks about the things they used to do, the lifestyle they used to have. He says that's what they have died to and those are the things they are to put off or put away from themselves. He describes what this new life centered on

Christ is like. Several times he uses the word “therefore” to connect the great things he says about Jesus to how people live as Jesus’ followers.

We were dead *in* sin, but in Christ we die *to* sin. We are buried with him in baptism. Then we are raised with him through our “faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (2:12-13, 20). That’s what Paul is talking about in 3:1-4 when he says we’ve been raised with Christ because we have died with him and now Christ is our life.

The vows of church membership that we use to profess our faith express the ideas that we find here in Colossians and throughout the Bible (These vows are in the “Baptismal Covenant,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* 34-35).

We express that we have died with Christ to sin and other evil powers when we “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of [our] sin” and “accept the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.”

We acknowledge that we have been raised with Christ, that our life is hidden with Christ in God, and that Christ is our life, when we “confess Jesus Christ as [our] Savior, put [our] whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as [our] Lord.”

We show that we are not doing this by ourselves when we promise to serve the Lord in union with the Church and when the congregation promises to tell the good news, live by Christ’s example and surround each other with a community of love and forgiveness.

I learned from a parent of one of our Confirmation students that when these youth were babies was when this congregation made the decision to relocate and construct a new building. That was around 2001. You were making that decision for these kids and many others like them. You were looking to the future that is now here. We often say that children and youth are “the future of the church,” and there’s something to that. But really, they *are* the church, along with all the rest of us.

We recognize our connection to the Church in all times and places when we profess our faith using the Apostles’ Creed. Since sometime in the second or third century, the Church has used this creed, or something a lot

like it, in baptism. We don't make up our own beliefs. We receive the faith that God gives through the Church and its teaching. The story that the creed tells is God's story of salvation. God includes us in that story when we put our trust in Jesus.

Paul says that in this new life in Christ we have a new devotion. We set our hearts on things above, on heavenly things. We have a new way of thinking. We set our minds on those heavenly things. We concentrate on and we are devoted to God's will, to the way of love and grace, to compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness (Col 3:12-14).

We have new life. Our life now is with Christ and because he is in God, we are in God. Christ *is* our life. He's not just part of our lives, not just one more commitment we've added to our list. He is our life. Without him, we have no life.

We also have new hope. The day will come when God will flood creation with the new life of heaven. Right now, we can't see Jesus in this world, but he will appear again. That will happen when God transforms the whole creation. What is now unseen will become visible. Earth and heaven will be joined forever in the fulfilled new creation. And everyone who is in Christ, whose life is now hidden with Christ in God, will also appear. We will be seen as the glorious and renewed human beings that we already really are (Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* 175).

The challenge between now and that future glorious day is to let the Holy Spirit help us live as what we are: the people of God, people in Christ, new creations who have died and been raised to new life.

Some of our young people are joining that adventure as they profess their faith through Baptism and Confirmation. We're all called to renew our commitment to that adventure.

Forty years ago, I was doing what these young people are doing today. I had asked Jesus to come into my heart as Lord and Savior. Then I approached my pastor and asked to be baptized and join the church. A couple of years later, I learned about the power of the Holy Spirit that's available to help us live as Jesus' people and to be his witnesses. I asked God to fill me with his Spirit. One immediate result was that I had a hunger

for God's word. I was devouring the Bible. Sometime in those early days of Bible reading I noticed this call to die with Christ and come alive in him. I remembered the line from a hymn, "Yes 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, just from sin and self to cease" ("*'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*" *UM Hymnal* #462). And I prayed, "Lord, help me die to sin and self." I don't know how to describe what happened, but I had a sensation of something shifting or moving inside me. Maybe it was a way for God to let me know that that prayer was real and that God was doing something real in me. I've repeated that kind of prayer in the ongoing rhythm of death and resurrection in Christ.

I've gone back and looked at the baptism service that was used when I was baptized. It includes this prayer:

O merciful God, grant that all sinful affections may die in this thy servant, and that all things belonging to thy Spirit may live and grow in him. Grant that he may have the power and strength to triumph over evil, may receive the fullness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I hope you can remember starting the adventure of life with Christ. I hope you have important events and landmarks along the way. If you haven't started that adventure, I hope you will today even as these young people make a new beginning by God's grace.