

Colossians 3:1-11

Proper 13C + August 7, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Hidden Life and Things Above

The Word of the Lord from Colossians 3:2-3: “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

The Law is pretty clear throughout our texts for this day. First Solomon laments that all is vanity. There he is – gifted by God with incredible wisdom and sitting on the throne of his father, David. His kingdom is full of wealth and power. In the world’s terms, he’s got it all. Still, his lament is one of emptiness: he realizes he has nothing of any real value. Solomon’s end is not a happy one: he turns from the Lord to all sorts of false gods in pursuit of happiness on earth. His end is the antithesis to Jesus, the Son of David and the wisdom of God, who remained faithful to God the Father – even to the cross – for your salvation.

The Gospel lesson presents us with the parable of the rich man. Like Solomon, he is a man of vast wealth – more than he can spend. Unlike Solomon, he doesn’t realize how meaningless it is. He goes to bed rejoicing in his riches, unaware that he won’t live to see the sunrise. Having so much, he has nothing at all – because his soul is required by the Lord, and his soul is sinful, so he is unprepared.

They’re different men, but the Law is clear. Both set their minds on things on earth, at the expense of things above. They’ve made idols out of wealth and things. Thus you have St. Paul’s admonition, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” You don’t know what the day brings, when your soul is required. Rejoice to receive the things above.

Beware, because the temptations are great. We live in a very prosperous land, for which we should rightly give thanks to God. However, Old Adam loves covetousness; and rather than move us to treasure contentment, he tempts us to want more things. As long as you fall prey to the sin of coveting, there is no such thing as “enough.” There is always something newer or better to buy; there is always more stuff to have. Now, it is not wrong in itself to have newer or better stuff. The problem is when these things become more important than the Lord or your love for your neighbor. That’s when they become idols.

On the other hand, passages like these have been used to say that wealth and possessions are wrong. If that’s true, you should get rid of all that you have, give it away. You should then live in poverty, because that’s supposedly a godlier way to live. In that case, it’s true you’ve no longer made wealth into an idol. You’ve made poverty into an idol instead – because you now believe that God loves you more because you don’t have so much.

The big problem here is not how much you have. Rather, the problem is the sinful nature that blinds you to the things above and makes you believe that the things you can see are more important. It need not be material things. You can make an idol out of a good job, weekends away, the feeling of security, a healthy marriage or a good friend. You can make a god out of contentment if you believe that this is what makes your life – if you believe that

that is what makes *you*. All of these things can be great blessings, unless they crowd out the things above and the salvation that God gives.

Paul says this in another way as he warns of sins in our text. He says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.” Those guilty of sexual immorality and impurity are those who want sexual intimacy on *their* terms, not according to God’s plan within marriage. Those guilty of evil desire and covetousness want success and goods on their terms, and don’t trust the Lord to provide. Thus, they make things of this world to be idols. Likewise, Paul warns that you must put away “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.” Those guilty of anger, wrath and malice want to judge and condemn people on their own terms, rather than let the Lord be judge. Those guilty of slander and obscene talk misuse the gift of words to harm, not to speak the truth and build up.

So “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Don’t let the things of this world become the end-all for you, because then they will be *the end* of you: the wrath of God is coming. Instead, set your mind on things above – but what does this mean? Above all, it means Jesus, who first came from heaven to earth to take your place.

It means your Savior, who ascended into heaven after dying on the cross for your sins and rising again.

It means Jesus, who sits at God’s right hand for your good – who hears your prayers, who declares you innocent before His Father.

It means Jesus, who made you His own in Baptism and made you a new creation, which is why Paul says that you *once* walked in these sins, but they’re just not *you* anymore.

It means Jesus, who visits you in this dying world to speak His Word of Gospel, to forgive your sins with His body and blood.

It means Jesus, who has not left you to be a *thing* on earth, but has made you a beloved child whom He will deliver into heaven.

Because you are His, all good things are yours. Without Him, you have nothing that will not be taken away from you. Heed the warnings, then, of the stories of Solomon and the rich man. Confess your sins of covetousness and idolatry, whatever you may covet and idolize. And rejoice in Christ, who sits above at God’s right hand to work all things for your good.

There is another reason to set your mind on things above: that is where your life is hidden. “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God,” says our text. That’s an astounding statement. A more joyful reason to rejoice in things above is because that is where your life truly is. Once upon a time, you only had life for this world – you were among the things passing away. But you have died: in your baptism, you were buried with Christ and raised with Him. Already now, you have eternal life. Already, your name is written in heaven, in the Lamb’s book of life. The treasures of heaven are yours.

There’s a problem for us sinners though: this life is hidden. You hear this – that the treasures of heaven are yours, and it may well be true that it sort of bounces off of you.

Meanwhile, the things of this world seem more real because they are tangible and sensual and fun. They seem so much more actual, and therefore more to be coveted and treasured. But they fall apart so quickly – a job or a relationship or a thing can be, eventually will be, lost. All in this world comes to an end. If that is how you measure your life, then it is quickly nothing, too. And if that is how you measure God's love for you, then you won't think much of God's love.

But God's love for you is sure, and it is so great that He has shed the blood of His Son to make you His own. You cannot yet see His great love clearly – it's hidden, it's hidden, often behind a veil of trouble. You cannot yet see His glory – that's hidden, too. You cannot see His grace like you can a new smart phone – it also is hidden from your eyes. But by faith, by God-given faith, you know that all of this is yours. As much as the things of this world seem important, the treasures of heaven are eternally better – and the treasures of this world will pass away.

Set your mind on things above – upon Christ and your life that is hidden with Him. That way, when you must suffer and suffer loss in this world, you can still say, "Although I feel pain and loss now, I have life – undying life – in Christ forever." And if you suffer loss right now, the promise is still true: despite what trouble may argue, you have undying life in Christ. It is so because you have already died with Him, and you are already raised with Him. It's hidden, but it is real and it is yours.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen