

### Colossians 3:1-7

Easter Wednesday + April 4, 2018  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Life in Death

The Word of the Lord from Colossians 3:3: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

Death, death, death. The Church proclaims death. That sounds disturbing. You don't put it on the church sign outside to attract visitors. But the Church is here to proclaim death.

In part, of course, this means proclaiming the Law of God. The Church preaches about sin because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and because "death spread to all men because all have sinned" (Romans 5:12); and that, apart from Christ, you are the walking dead in your trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We proclaim that death is coming, *and* we proclaim *why* death is coming. Both are important.

It may seem silly that we have to proclaim that death is coming, but denial comes easy to so many. Many avoid going to the doctor because they're afraid of hearing that they have a condition that *can be cured*: they'd rather live in denial than fight the disease. And if that is how people deal with affliction that's curable, how much more will they deny the reality that death will come sooner or later? It's a testimony to the frailty and fearfulness of man, as well as the fearsomeness of death, that many simply refuse to face the problem. So the Church preaches that death is a reality, but not because we want to be a killjoy. We preach the reality of death because we want people to be prepared for death, so that they might know the hope of eternal life, and know the cure of the resurrection.

Furthermore, the Church declares that death comes because of sin. If telling people they're going to die isn't enough to annoy them, we tell them that it's their sinfulness that does it. Not only that, but we don't just declare physical death, but eternal death – we warn of God's judgment and hell. No wonder Paul says (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) that, to unbelievers, we *smell* like death! Why do we preach this message? Because according to the Word of God, it's true: and if you don't have the right diagnosis, then you're not ready for the right cure. More to the point: if you don't believe that it's sin that's killing you, then won't see forgiveness as the antidote.

So we preach the Law to prepare the way for the Gospel. We proclaim death so that people are prepared when we proclaim life to them.

And to proclaim life to them...we proclaim death once again. We proclaim the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The death of the Son of God is what we call the Gospel: we call it Good News. Because it is. The Good News is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has died in our place. It wasn't just a physical death on the cross. It was eternal death – God's judgment for the sins of the world. Because He's died that death for your sin, you don't have to. There's still physical death for you unless the Lord returns soon, but it's a conquered enemy now. Jesus has His boot on death's throat so that it can only do what He permits, and He uses that defeated enemy to deliver you from this dying world to everlasting life.

This is Good News: the death of Jesus, the willing Lamb of God, means life – eternal life – for you.

That's why Jesus came – to die for sin. Risen from the dead three days later, that's the message He gave the Church to proclaim: we proclaim His death until He comes.

So we proclaim death because of sin, and the death of Jesus Christ for our sin. And now, says St. Paul in Colossians, we get to proclaim death one more time, and it sounds very odd. He says, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

You look pretty good for people who have died.

We're speaking of Holy Baptism, of course. Hear these words of life and death from St. Paul in Romans 6:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. (Romans 6:3-5)

Jesus won salvation for you by His death and resurrection, but He didn't hand it out at the cross or the empty tomb. He gives that salvation in His means of grace, including Holy Baptism. In baptism, He joins you to Himself and His death for your sin. His death is now your death, so you have already died to sin. And if you're joined to Him, and Jesus is risen from the dead, then you are already alive again. You walk in newness of life. You already have eternal life.

That's what St. Paul is saying when he says, "You have died (already!), and your life is hidden with Christ in God." For now, Christ and your life are hidden: you live by faith while your eyes still see death. But by faith, you trust that the Christ hidden from your eyes is present in His means of grace, keeping you alive in Him even though you still face death.

How is it that you've already died and still face death? Revelation talks about two deaths, the first death and the second death. The first one is the little one – "merely" the death of the body. The second one is the big one – eternal death for sin. You've already died the second death. You've already died the big one, because Jesus died it for you on the cross – hell and all – and joined you to it by a little bit of water and His Word. You've still got the little death to go – and the "little death" of the body is still big enough to terrify puny sinners like you and me; but because Christ has died and Christ has risen, and because Christ has joined you to His death and resurrection, you know that He will use the death of your body to deliver you to Himself in glory, fully healed and restored and free of sin: Garden-of-Eden good, better than you ever have been.

Until then, what could go wrong? Paul tells you that too. He writes, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). Here's the temptation: your life is hidden with Christ in God. It's yours, but you can't see it. In the meantime, you can still see sin, and some of it sometimes looks pretty attractive to that old sinful flesh of yours. Paul lists off a bunch of sins you can see and that often have a draw. He also tells you what the problem is: they will kill you. To indulge in these sins willfully or to continue in them persistently will harden your heart and destroy your faith. In doing so, you throw away the life God has given you because you say, "I'd rather have this sin for me, than have Jesus who died to take this sin away." Simply put, that leads to condemnation. If you don't have Jesus, you don't have His life; if you don't have His life, all that's left is death. Or, as Paul puts it, "On account of these the wrath of God is coming."

That's not who you are anymore. That's the stuff of the dead, and you're not among the dead. You've died to sin and you've been raised up again. These sins are the stuff of the living dead who are outside the kingdom of God; and that's not you, because you're a holy child of God, a member of His household forever. To return to these sins now is like running back into a burning building after the firefighters have carried you out. It's like jumping off the boat after rescuers have pulled you from the sea.

Flee these sins. You're not to live in them anymore, because to live in them is to die in them. Cast off these sins and repent when they intrude, because you *are* alive. Christ has died and Christ is risen indeed; and because He has joined you to His death and resurrection, you are risen indeed too. That's the Good News of His Gospel, revealed in His holy Word. That's the stuff of which Paul speaks when he says, "If then 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" (Colossians 3:1-2).

For the things from above – like the Gospel and grace and salvation – announce this incredible news: You have died. That's already behind you. You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. It will not always be hidden, because Christ will return in glory for all to see. And, says Paul, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). All of that is yours because Christ, who died your death, is risen again. All of that is yours because He has joined you to Himself in Holy Baptism. All of this is because He is no longer in the tomb; risen again, He is in the Supper.

All of that is yours, because for His sake you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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