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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13C)

July 31, 2016

Text: Colossians 3:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear saints of God, that's what you are, saints of God: holy, pure, complete, undefiled, filled with the Holy Spirit, children of the Father, alive in the resurrection life of Jesus, and clothed in His righteousness. You are saints of God.

Are you skeptical? Don't believe me? The apostle Paul greets the Colossian Christians as saints, "To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae..." (1:2).

Remember a few weeks ago when we began this series in Colossians and I showed to you from chap. 1 that as Christians, you are filled with faith in Christ, love for all the saints, and the hope of heaven (vs. 4–5). God's Word says later in the same chapter, "(Jesus) has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him..." (vs.22). You are saints of God because you are alive in Christ Jesus. That's the greatest news any man, woman, or child can tell or hear. You are saints of God.

But I suspect there's that nagging doubt rolling around in your mind and conscience. Pastor, you don't know what I've done, what I've thought, or what I've felt. True. I don't know. But I don't need to know. God's Word has already told me that you are a sinner in thought, word, and deed. The righteous actions, thoughts, and feelings, you would do and have, you don't do nor do you have them. The unrighteous actions, thoughts, and feelings, you don't want to do and have are a constantly plague for you end up doing and having them (i.e., Rom. 7). As true as all that is, you are still saints of God because of Christ Jesus. What He says counts more than what you say.

Look at today's reading from Colossians 3:1, "If then you have been raised with Christ..." Let's stop there. You all know that I love grammar. So get ready. This is a "past particular supposition." With this grammatical construction, nothing in the sentence implies fulfillment or non-fulfillment. The context in which the sentence is

found must guide your interpretation as to whether or not we have been raised with Christ.¹ In this case, Paul had already written in 2:10–14:

¹⁰(A)nd you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.
¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

The immediate context of Colossians says that since you are filled to full with Jesus, been buried with Him in baptism and raised to life again by the powerful working of God, been forgiven all your trespasses, and all the record of debt which stood against you was nailed to the Lord's cross, you are – without a doubt, absolutely certain – raised with Christ. You are saints of God, raised to life Jesus. Isn't that amazing!!!!

We could end this sermon right now, rejoicing in our eternal victory in Christ Jesus. And that wouldn't be all bad! A short sermon for once ☺. But if I did that, I would be robbing you, taking away from you more good news that Jesus has for you.

Your sainthood was given to you in your baptism. That's what Col. 2:12 said. Buried with Jesus in baptism, raised with Him through faith. Now that you are baptized into Christ and raises to life with Him.... “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” (vs. 1–2). Dear baptized saints of God, keep on seeking the things of eternal salvation. Keep setting your mind on the heavenly things of love, virtue, grace, forgiveness, and God's kingdom. Your life is to be characterized by the holiness of heaven rather than the sins of this evil earth (Deterding, 138).

Your baptism into the death and life of the risen Lord Jesus changes you. The Lord's gospel makes you different. Vs. 3–4 gives a wonderful explanation as to why you are now different, “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in Christ. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” We come back to the same truth given earlier in the epistle. Through baptism, you died to

¹ Paul Deterding, “Colossians” p. 135. CPH 2003.

the sins and evils of this fallen world. Your life of faith, which guides your thoughts, words, actions, and feelings, is hidden with Christ in God the Father almighty. You are saints of God. That is the glorious, transformative truth of Christ's gospel. But your life in Christ is hidden. In other words, your eternal, undying, can never be quenched life is hidden under the shadow of suffering, crosses, afflictions, and persecutions (Deterding, 139).

That's why we can never use the experiences of life on this side of eternity as an absolute measure of your life of faith. Hardship does not mean your Christian faith is lacking or that God is punishing you. Nor does prosperity mean God is blessing you for strong faith or mighty works of piety. You are saints of God. Complete, whole, pure, and perfect. But it's hidden with Christ in God. Never forget that powerful promise of the Gospel: your life is hidden with Jesus.

And cling tenaciously to the promise that when Christ returns again on the Last Day, you will appear with Him "in glory" (vs. 4). At the resurrection of just, Jesus will fulfill all that He won for you in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand. God's the Father's glory and all the glory of heaven will be yours as what is now hidden will be fully revealed for all the renewed universe to see.

Dear saints of God, that's what you are, saints of God. Now go out it into this world and live a life worthy of your identity as saints in Christ. Be who you are. Do what you're called to do as the redeemed of the Lord. What I want you to see, is that the Lord's gospel has so changed you that you now seek to be different. Your minds are set on things above, where Christ is, not on the evil of this world.

This is the transition that Paul makes beginning in vs. 5. Because of who you are in Christ, now live this kind of life. Listen again to the what the apostle says about your day to day life hidden in Christ.

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. (*notice the past tense!*) ⁸But now you must put them all away: (*Why? Because your life is hidden with Christ who is at the Father's right hand*) anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Vs. 9 & 10 are the clinchers for understanding your baptismal identity in Christ. Put off the old self and put on the new self. That's baptism language. Your old, sinful nature, with all its practices of immorality, impurity, evil desires, anger malice, and obscene talk, must be shed and removed every day through repentance and faith in Jesus. In its place, the new self must daily emerge to live in virtue and holiness as is befitting for saints of God. For the new self is, according to vs. 10, being renewed – notice the on-going present tense of that word – in knowledge after the image of God, our creator. Every day is a baptismal day of dying to sin and living in Christ.

How does that hidden life of faith manifest itself in the midst of this evil world? Please grab the extra handout on which you will find Colossians 3:12–17. This is a positive description of your baptismal life in Christ:

¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

That is the life to which we are called. This life reflects who we are in Christ. That is the life of saints. Will you do this perfectly? No. That's why it's a constant, day by day, putting off the old and putting on the new. But that life reflects who you are in Christ Jesus: holy, pure, complete, undefiled, filled with the Holy Spirit, children of the Father, alive in the resurrection life of Jesus, and clothed in His righteousness. You are saints of God.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.