**July 31, 2022 Colossians 3:1-11**

***A New Life***

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:1-11 NRSV

*(1)So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2)Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, (3)for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4)When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. (5)Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). (6)On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. (7)These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. (8)But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. (9)Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices (10)and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. (11)In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*

**Notes:**

1. If you have been ***raised*** with Christ, what follows is for you;
   1. Have I been ***raised*** with Christ?
   2. Am I being ***transformed*** in the image of Christ?
   3. the goal is a ***new*** ***life*** in Christ.
2. How does ***new*** ***life*** in Christ come about, anyway?
   1. ***Choice*** and ***Response***.
   2. God ***calls*** you to a higher and noble purpose.
   3. God ***calls*** and it is up to you to ***respond***.
   4. Each of us must ***come*** to Christ in our own personal way.
3. As we ***look*** to Jesus, we can find the best in others and us.
   1. Do not ***revert*** ***back*** to the way they once were.
   2. Whatever, takes your focus off Jesus; is what you should ***remove***.
   3. If left to our own devices we would have no ***hope***.
4. God looks upon our sorry, sinful state and he ***loves*** us anyway.
   1. God counts us as ***righteous*** even though we are not.
   2. Respond in ***gratitude*** and sing from our hearts,
   3. A new life in Christ is inclusive to ***all*** who repent of sin.
   4. The Body of Christ includes ***barbarians*** and ***Scythians***.
5. All who follow Jesus, are part of ***God’s*** ***church***.
   1. Be a part of ***God’s*** ***kingdom***;
   2. ***Transition*** into who the Lord would have you to be.
   3. ***Extend*** God’s love, mercy, and grace to all people.

**Script:**

There are transitions in our lives, places where we see the old ways of doing things transition to new ways. Events in our lives initiate these transitions; events like graduation, marriage, a new job, retirement, a devastating disease or tragedy in our lives, and even the death of loved ones. While each of these events differ greatly, the one thing they have in common is the transition to a new type of life, and a different way of living. I remember the transition in my life as I moved away from home and entered college; for the first time in my life I was on my own to some degree and I was responsible for getting to class on time and getting decent grades. I remember the transition in my life after Jan and I got married, I had to adjust my lifestyle to accommodate my bride. I experienced transitions like this throughout my life; each time life had changed, there was a transition, and while life may not have been much different, life as I knew it would never be the same.

We all encounter these types of changes in our lives and each of us adjust to these transitions in different ways. How you have transitioned to similar life events may be different than what I have experienced. Even more different may be the type of life events you have experienced; they may be completely different than mine and so you may have transitioned in different ways.

In my life there is no change, no event, that has affected my life so greatly and caused me to transition so radically rather than experiencing this new life in Christ. We have been traveling through Colossians these past few weeks and today we continue on this trek into chapter 3. In chapter 1 Paul commended the Colossians for their faithful witness. In chapter 2, he warned them to beware of competing ideologies. And in today's passage, he goes on to admonish them to embrace their new life in Christ. Stand with me as we share in the reading of Colossians 3:1-11.

***Colossians 3:1-11 NRSV (1)So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2)Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, (3)for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4)When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. (5)Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). (6)On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. (7)These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. (8)But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. (9)Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices (10)and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. (11)In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!***

Did you hear how Paul begins this passage, “***(1)So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2)Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth…***” The operative word here is “if”, “***if you have been raised with Christ***.” The implication is this: If you have been raised with Christ, what follows is for you; if not, nothing others say will make a difference. So you need to ask yourself, “Have I been raised with Christ? Have I been born again? Am I in the process of being transformed in the image of Christ? Am I going on to perfection, day by day?” In case you haven’t heard, that’s the goal – new life in Christ. All else is mere talk.

So, how does new life in Christ come about, anyway? The answer is just two words: Choice and Response. First, God gets your attention, He calls you and makes you aware of his presence by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether during a mountaintop experience or in the dark night of the soul, God claims you as one of his own and calls you to a higher and noble purpose.

We commonly think we are the ones who need to take the first step. Scripture teaches the opposite. For example, God called the people of Israel and set them apart from the other nations; God called the prophets and gave them their voice; Jesus called his disciples and made them part of his kingdom. God called them, he reminds us in John 15:16, “John 15:16 NRSV You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit…”

God chooses, that’s the first step; and once he claims you as his own, then it is up to you to choose to respond in faith, to say just like Samuel did in 1 Samuel 3:9, “…Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” Or you could say it like Isaiah in 6:8, “…Here am I; send me!” or it could be as simple and humble as the father who begged Jesus to heal his sick child, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” God calls and it is up to you to respond. Nobody can do that for you.

Have you ever heard the saying, “God has many children, but no grandchildren.” This is a very true statement; each of us must come to Christ in our own personal way. This is the moment when new life in Christ begins. So Paul makes it clear to the Colossians, and to us, when he says, “***(1)So if you have been raised with Christ,***” but he doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say, “…***seek the things that are above***…”

As I have mentioned before, the Colossians were subjected to influences of heresy, idolatry, and all kinds of sinful behavior. It is no different for us today. Look around, the world we live in is filled with distorted ideas and images, every place we turn you see vile practices and hear foul language. Just turn on the TV or travel to a more populated city and you may get the idea that you are living in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But there is another reality, a reality of truth and beauty, of kindness and virtue, of graciousness, generosity, and love. You can find traces of it here in our community, here in Bedford County, here in Ryot, and here in our small church, in this congregation. It depends on where you look and what you are looking for, but it is there. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians he says, ***“… whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***” Much like the story of the two wolves I shared last week; you can always find fault in other people; but, at the same time if you look for it, you can also find good as well. Again, it depends on which wolf you feed. You can criticize and cut down, or you can encourage and build up.

Here is the point, Jesus died that our sins would be forgiven. He rose again that we may receive the gift of new life. When we look to him and focus on his words and teaching, we can find the best in others, the best in us.

Now we know that Paul is not going to stop at this. SO after encouraging the Colossians to look above to this new life in Christ, he goes on to warn them not to look down; not to revert back to the way they once were. “***(5)Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly…***” and then he goes on to make a list of vices. He probably could have went on, because there is no limit to the ways man has found to sin. But I think what he was trying to say is this, “Whatever, causes you to take your focus off of Jesus; this is what you should remove from your life.” Simply put we are all sinners, from the inside out. Even our best efforts to be righteous are often able to be misguided and fall short. If left to our own devices we would have no hope.

The good news is that God looks upon our sorry, sinful state and he loves us anyway. Paul writes to the Romans, “***…since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus… (3:23-24)***” Imagine standing before a judge in a courtroom; reading the charges against you. Consider the prosecutors arguments against you and the countless witnesses whose testimony confirms the prosecutors’ accusations. Each witness testifying to your guilt. And when the prosecutor finishes his case against you the judge slams the gavel down on his bench; and do you know what he says? “Not Guilty!”

This is the miracle of God’s grace; this is the depth of His love for each of us. God counts us as righteous even though we are not. “***For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6 NRSV***” God’s grace comes first and in the words of 1 John 4:19, “We love Him because he first loved us.” It is only as we awaken to what God has already accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are able to respond in gratitude and sing from our hearts, Songs like Victory in Jesus.

The result of God’s amazing grace is that we have no reason to boast; our new life in Christ has anything to do with what we’ve accomplished or deserve. Neither do we have any reason or right to stand in judgment of others. The gift of new life in Christ is inclusive of all those God calls and who are willing to repent of their sins and walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Paul states in verse 11, “***(11)In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!***”

Can you imagine how this must have sounded to the Colossians? Within the church at Colossae there were predominantly Gentile Christians, who had no background whatsoever in the Jewish faith. Some were circumcised, some were not; yet, in Christ, they were no different. The same can be said of landowners and slaves; in the church, they stood side by side on a level playing field. But this pales by comparison to another category Paul mentions. He says the Body of Christ also includes barbarians and Scythians.

One may ask who are the barbarians. They are those who are …Barbaric. They are unclean and rude. They don’t wash their hands before eating, they don’t brush their teeth, they hardly ever bathe, and wear the same filthy clothes day after day. Barbarians are not the type of people you would invite into your home for a Sunday lunch.

But if these barbarians cause you to cringe, the Scythians will make your skin crawl. According to Dick Donovan (a publisher of Sermon illustrations) “(While) the Greeks thought of non-Greeks as barbarians— people who spoke a crude language and lived crude lives, Scythians were an extreme type of barbarian— known for their savagery and shocking practices such as drinking the blood of their enemies.” I believe you can get the picture, you wouldn’t tell your kids to go over to the Scythians to play. But Paul makes no bones about it and expressively includes the Scythians.

In Christ there is no distinctions. All who follow Jesus, no matter who they are or where they are from, are part of God’s church. We are the church, all of us together. When we repent of our sin, when we accept Christ as our lord and savior, we surrender our rights and begin a walk with people we may have never accepted or befriended before; rich or poor, all ethnicities, all skin tones; we are one in Christ. When we repent and accept Jesus as our savior, we begin a new life, free from the sins of our past.

You have been given a new life in Christ. No matter where you have come from, or how you were raised, you have been given the opportunity to be a part of God’s kingdom; adopted into the family of God. You are now able to transition from who you once were into who the Lord would have you to be. You have been extended such grace, mercy, and love. In return don’t you think you should extend the same grace, mercy, and love to others.

We as the church are not called to save the lost, we are called to extend God’s love, mercy, and grace to all people no matter if they are the good people of the community or Scythians.