

Easter 1A
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
April 9, 2023

Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

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

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

What is it about today that draws us all together?

Is it the music? We know that the music – the choir, the instruments, the organ, the keyboard -- all will resound with great joy and praise. Yet, we can find great music on Pandora or public radio or Spotify.

Is it the beauty that we experience here this morning? We know that the sanctuary will be dressed to the nines – flowers in abundance, lovely paraments on the altar. And the magnificent beauty and perhaps even the fragrance of the lilies that grace our worship space. Yet, we can experience great beauty at Hollis Gardens or a walk around Lake Hollingsworth.

Is it the Gospel story that we've just heard read? We know that on this day, this Sunday, the Gospel will be the telling of the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, we could read this good news in our own Bibles at home without having to drive and, we could have a good cup of coffee with it to boot.

Are we here because we want to spend time with our family on this wonderful holiday? Actually, we'd be better able to have conversation and tell jokes and enjoy a laugh or two if we were at breakfast or brunch in a restaurant or at our own kitchen table.

No, the reason that we are drawn here today is because we want and yearn to be together on this day of all days, this day in which we rejoice and celebrate that death has been conquered, death does not have the last word, because – He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! And this fact, means that things are changed for us forever.

In today's reading from the Letter to the Colossians, we hear some startling things – we have been raised with Christ; our life is hidden with Christ in God; we will be revealed with Christ in glory. Fundamental changes that bring about amazing results. Resurrection life lived in Christ and revealed in glory. Amazing.

And because of these tremendous truths, the letter writer urges that we set our minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. The Christians in Colossa lived in the midst of competing philosophies and values. In addition to the more sophisticated philosophers, most people just wanted to make sense of their lives and find real meaning: a little Jesus, a little consumerism where we just want more of the things we want, a little Hollywood glitz to spice things up – but not too much, mind you, a little nationalism because that's who we are after all and a dash of legalism so that we know the rules and can keep track of those who keep them and those who break them. And that's how the day in and day out world would turn. And truth be told, isn't it a bit like that still today? And so, in contrast to the world around them, they are urged to seek the things that are above and to set their mind on them.

Now, I want you to note one very important thing. The writer does not say, “Seek the things that are above and then you will be hidden in Christ.” No, he says, “Since you have been raised with Christ you will set your mind on the things above.” Now I will be the first to tell you that there is much that I do not understand about this. These are lofty words, aren’t they. But Paul wrote this to the Christians in Rome: *do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.*

Baptism is the sacramental means by which God draws us together into union with the Holy Trinity and in relationship with one another and indeed with all of creation. With ordinary water, the Lord’s extraordinary word, and God’s eternal promises, we are washed and forgiven and changed – forever. God will never let go of us.

Now, in our human way of looking at things, we can get things mixed up. We can think that IF we seek the things that are above, IF we set our mind in heavenly places, THEN we are hidden in Christ and will receive these rich promises. That is not true. Instead, it goes like this instead – BECAUSE we are hidden in Christ through the covenant and promises of baptism, therefore we set our mind on the things above because of God’s good gift of grace to us. A grace that loves us first. Grace that brings good into our lives even when we don’t see it. Grace that grows the love we have for God and for one another. Grace not of ourselves but grace that is pure gift from God.

And because of this grace outpoured, we join the saints of old who have said, “My soul is restless until it finds its rest in you O God.” – in the things that are above, the things not of this world – not “a little Jesus, a little consumerism where we just want more of the things we want, a little Hollywood glitz to spice things up – but not too much, mind you, a little nationalism because that’s who we are after all and a dash of legalism so that we know the rules and can keep track of those who keep them and those who break them.”

No, our life is different because we have been wrapped up into the mystery of faith, a mystery that defies comprehension by our human understanding. A mystery that does not need to be analyzed or solved but can be simply lived. The mystery that God comes to us consistently and persistently – God comes to us in Jesus.

And in his resurrection, Jesus was the first to step out of the tomb. And then we with him. Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus was triumphant over the hands of human cruelty. Jesus conquered sin, death and all that is evil. Because Jesus did this, we who are wrapped up into him – indeed as the Epistle reading told us – hidden in him – we too have been redeemed from sin, death and all that is evil. And that, my friends, is good news!

We are here because Jesus has called us together, has marked us with the sign of his cross forever, has gathered us up into his resurrection and has given us work to do – so that – his resurrected life may be spread to all whom we touch.

We are here together this amazing morning because we yearn to live into this mystery that is so much bigger than we ourselves, our ideas, our plans, our wants, our needs. We are here this morning so that we can leave this place and bear the way of Christ into the places in this world that need it the most.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Thanks be to God.