

Trinity VII, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Co.3:1-11; Lk.12:13-21; Ezek 36:22-28.

***You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.***

I wonder how many of you are sitting there this morning fully aware that you are, in fact, dead?

You may think you're alive. You may be quite sure of it. Heart beating: check. Breathe in, breathe out: check. Touch something – definitely still here. Check.

But Paul says you've died. Colossians 3, verse 3: *you have died* and your life is hid with God in Christ. And he's not just being careless or having an off day. This is the sort of thing he says again and again. If you are a Christian, then in some sense – and in Paul's mind there's a good case for saying *in the most important sense* you have died. It's there in Romans Chapter 6: we've been buried with Christ, baptised into his death, Paul says there. It's there in 2 Corinthians 5: Christ died for all, and therefore all have died. It's there in Galatians 2: I have been crucified with Christ. We're touching here on something central to Paul's thought. As he puts it in Colossians, *you have died*, and your life is hid with God in Christ.

What does he mean? He means this: when you become a Christian, the change involved is as radical as a death. Indeed, it *is* a death. It is the end of an old way of living. And he doesn't just mean that there might be some minor changes in your habits – that you might start going to church every week, or saying your prayers, or generally being a nicer person. All those things are of course much to be desired, but really, they are just tweaks. Just minor little adjustments. Paul is talking about a change that goes much, much deeper down. In the language of the Old Testament reading, Ezekiel, he is talking about God giving you a new heart – ripping out your heart of stone and giving you a heart of flesh. In the famous language of John's Gospel, Chapter Three, he's talking about being born again. In the language of his own life, he's talking about a change as radical as that from Saul to Paul: from the persecutor of the Church to the apostle of Jesus. It is the end of one life, and the beginning of a new.

At which point you might think: um. That doesn't sound very much like me. Actually, there is no *spectacular* change I can point to in my life. I wasn't that wicked beforehand, and I'm not that holy now. Maybe I'm not doing this whole Christianity thing right. Maybe I'm not really born again.

To which, of course, one answer might be: yes indeed. Maybe you're not. Maybe you never have really realised the *difference* Jesus is meant to make, the truth that being a Christian is not just the same thing as being a nice person. Being a Christian is about everything deep down changing, everything being re-organised around God and Jesus. God and Jesus – God-in-Jesus – become not just something we pay vague attention to on a Sunday, but become the deepest, controlling, shaping reality of our whole lives. And maybe, if you feel the language of dying and being born again has no relevance, no reality, at all for you – maybe that is indeed a sign that God is calling you, urgently, to a new kind of seriousness, a new kind of commitment. Don't dismiss that thought too quickly.

On the other hand, it is worth remembering the second half of what Paul says in Colossians 3 verse 3: you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. In other words, the new you, the born again you, the you God has always dreamed of and is even now making – that you is still hidden. You think there's not much difference between the new you and the old you, and so far you might well be right, because you can't see much of the new one yet. But the message of the whole New Testament is that you can barely can to imagine your future self. God's plan is to so fill you with goodness, with joy, with beauty, with Himself that, as C.S Lewis once put it, if you could see your future self now you would be strongly tempted to fall down and worship. The whole creation waits with eager longing, says Paul in Romans 8, for the revelation of the glorious liberty of the children of God. The glorious liberty of the children of God. Who can begin to imagine what those words mean? Paul thinks they mean *us*, *us* swept up in the astonishing destiny God plans for us, that God has begun in us. We are going to be astonishing.

And it's because of that unbelievable, indescribable glory that awaits that some very straightforwardly describable changes begin to happen in our lives now. So in Colossians 3, Paul goes on to say: *Therefore* – since your life is hid with God in Christ, since one day you will be revealed with him in glory – *therefore*, now, let's see some practical changes. In particular, you Colossians, let's see your sexuality sorted out. Enough of all this casual promiscuity. Enough of cheating, enough of pornography, enough of sex which means nothing. Don't you know who you are? Don't you know how astonishing even your bodies are, how much glory they are to bear? How can you treat them so cheaply now? And enough, too, of the way you fight each other, and look down on each other and despise each other: enough of all this anger, wrath, malice and slander. You are to be the kings and queens of the universe! You will be more glorious than angels! Enough already of this snapping and biting at each other. And of course, if we were to look across at today's Gospel reading, we could also say – enough of all this piling up money, all this looking after ourselves and piling up comfort. Your gold and silver is as nothing besides the glory that awaits: to focus on just getting more of it, knowing what you know, being who you *are* - it's like focussing on mud. It is not worthy. Leave it behind.

How we behave sexually. How we treat each other, and speak about each other. Our relationship with money. Those are the parts of life our first century writers thought our impending glory should change. Sexual behaviour. How we treat each other, and speak about each other. Money. The twenty first century is not *that* different from the first. If you're a Christian, these things should be changing.

Note the important thing though. The Christian message is never just try and be a better person. That's what really matters, having good values and trying the best you can. Indeed, we often turn the message into that. We so quickly make our religion into a matter of ethics: 'What really matters is being a good person.' *No*, says Paul, and *no* says the Gospel. What really matters is that you are swept up into the glorious liberty of the children of God, what really matters is that God became human so that you could become divine, what really matters is that because of Jesus all the old things are passing away and there will be a new creation, and you are part of it! Only because these things are true do you even get to be a good person: and that means not just a person who keeps the rules – how boring and small *that* would be - but to be what you were made to be: the glorious, vibrant, astonishing image of God. Ethics matter, of course they do: but they're not the Gospel. The Gospel is that you have died, and your life is hid with God in Christ, and that one day you will be revealed with him in glory. And for that we give thanks to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.