

“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. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

If you joined us on Good Friday, you know that we talked of living in a Good Friday world. Good Friday, that day of darkness when the Lord of All Creation was nailed to the cross to suffer and die as He pays the price for our redemption, seems to show the powers of death and hell at work. It reminds us of the devil’s evil power at work in our world. We live in a Good Friday world because the devil continues to do anything and everything he can to destroy the gracious work of our Saviour and to keep us from the life God wants us to have through faith in Christ.

We could spend hours reciting a litany of all that is less than wonderful in our world. Thankfully, we come today to remember something that is not only wonderful, but which brings change and blessings to our troubled world. If you were here Friday, you know the refrain: it’s Friday, but Sunday’s coming!

Easter is the Sunday we need. Everything we remember today tells us how God brings hope in the midst of the uncertainty of our lives. THE Sunday has come. With it comes the good news of this day: The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

What if we could not say this? What if we came here only to mourn the loss of the Lord of Life? What if the resurrection did not really happen? Then all the troubles, turmoils, pains and cares of this world would seem so much worse. They would be overwhelming to us, because there would be no hope, no peace, no forgiveness and no heavenly joy for us in the days to come.

Rejoice, my dear people, so loved by God, for the message of the angel at the tomb is certain and true: ***“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”*** (Matthew 28:5–6, ESV) Jesus is alive, and we are alive with Him. Jesus lives—and death, hell and Satan have lost their power over us. Jesus lives, and the life we have in the living Lord enables us to live above the worries and cares of this world, and beyond the reach of death and the devil. We live in Him and with Him, in the confidence of God’s grace and blessing working all things for the good of the people He loves.

In a world of uncertainty, doubt and despair, the resurrection of Christ brings hope, confidence and deliverance. Everything is different because Jesus lives. The power of the life we have in Christ makes a difference for every moment of our life. There is no care, problem or trouble so great that the believer cannot look beyond it to see the glorified and Risen Lord who declares to us: ***“Because I live, you also will live.”*** (John 14:19, ESV)

Paul goes even further in our text. He tells us that we have already died and have been raised with Christ. Only a few verses before our text, Paul describes how our death and resurrection took place: ***“[you have] 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.”*** (Colossians 2:12, ESV) That is the great blessing of our Baptism. It unites us with Christ both in His death for us and then in His resurrection. Now, we live in Him and with Him in the sure and certain hope of heaven’s eternal glory.

No matter what this world may bring into our lives, the baptized, believing child of God knows the truth that Paul declares by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** The living Lord watches over the very people for whom He gave His life on the cross. All those things that could make our lives bitter—wars or rumours of war; recession or depression; sickness, or even death—are powerless over us. In the moments of joy or of sadness; in times of confidence or in times of doubt; in prosperity or adversity the resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks of the life we have through faith in Him: a life in which we live above and beyond the sorrow and hopelessness of this world, and in the forgiveness and grace that is ours through the crucified and risen Christ.

And yet, as we gather on this Easter Sunday, we still find that we often feel overwhelmed by the burdens and cares of this world. The sad memories, the doubtful moments of this life still plague us. Jesus lives, but trouble and sorrow haven’t gone away. People still die. People still get cancer. People still lose their jobs. People still get divorced. And we all still find

ourselves giving in to the temptations of sin and evil. It isn't very comfortable for us to have to say with St. Paul: "***For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.***" (Romans 7:18-19, ESV) With Paul, we also cry out: "***Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?***" (Romans 7:24, ESV)

The answer to that question is found in the good news we hear from the angel: "***He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.***" (Matthew 28:5-6, ESV) All that would make this a Good Friday world must yield to the greater glory of the Lord of Life. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

If we do not feel the joy of this day; if we do not experience the power of the Resurrection, maybe it is because we are looking for answers in all the wrong places. Paul tells us in our text: ***set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*** The resurrected and ever-living Lord calls us to the joy of life in Him. And yet we often give up that joy, that confidence, that peace, and become caught up in the things of this world. Paul encourages us to look up and to be living above, remembering day by day the life that we have as the baptized children of God. But instead of living above, we focus too much on the things of this world. It has been said that most people tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. We often concern ourselves more with our material possessions than with our soul's salvation. We are careful that we do not miss out on the activities and enjoyments that this world has to offer, but we have little time to spend in worship, in devotion and in bible study. We chase after those things that cannot satisfy, yet we lose sight of the One who alone can bring peace and rest to hearts and lives. A farmer found an eagle with an injured wing. He took the eagle to his home, and tended to the wound. While the eagle recuperated, it lived among the farmer's chickens. It wasn't long before the farmer noticed that the eagle was acting more like a chicken than the majestic bird it was. It wasn't caged, but it didn't fly away. Even though its wing had healed, it had lost sight of the sky, and stayed on the ground. Finally the farmer took the eagle out to the top of a hill, and placed it up on a pole. At last the eagle saw the vast expanse of the sky, opened its wings, and soared into the skies once again.

When we, like that eagle, keep our eyes fixed on this world, we find ourselves caught in the pains, the disappointments and the vices of this world. Instead of soaring in the new life we have in Christ, we find ourselves earth-bound. And we wonder why we don't see anything breathtaking. But when we set our hearts and our minds on the things above; when we focus our hearts and our lives on the resurrected and ascended Lord, He lifts us out of the muck and mire of this world into the joy of heavenly glory. We fix our eyes on the living Christ, and we find ourselves leaving the troubles of this world behind, as we enjoy the blessings of a life free from sin and death, a life that is truly worth the living when it is lived by faith in Jesus Christ.

On September 12, 1962, President John F. Kennedy gave a speech at Rice University to bolster support for the efforts of space exploration. In the midst of the space race, Kennedy made the bold statement: "We choose to go to the moon". That bold plan was fulfilled on July 24, 1969 when Apollo 11 landed on the moon and astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. It was a major event, but may have been all but forgotten until this week when the Artemis II launch is again causing people to set their thoughts on things above. While this flight is just about going around the moon, the longer goal is to establish a base on the moon.

Will this happen? Will people ever live on the moon? Perhaps. Does it matter? Not really. But our living above does matter. Our living above doesn't come through our creativity, through our power or wisdom. It comes because the Lord of heaven came to us. He willingly and lovingly gave His life for us on the cross and then rose again to destroy our old enemies of sin, death and hell. He left heaven's glory to bring us to the glory of heaven.

We do not yet experience the fulness of joy we will have when Christ, who is our life, comes to take us to be with Him forever in that unending life of joy and celebration. But even now, the heart that trusts in Christ is living above. We know that heaven is our home, and that the Lord, who died and rose again is our life and salvation. Alive in Christ, we live above, as we put to death the old sinful nature with its evil lusts and desires that blind our hearts and our minds. We, who are living above also live beyond this world as we clothe ourselves with the life we have in Christ—the life of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Yes, we do live in a Good Friday world. But in the resurrection of Christ our Sunday has indeed come. Lift up your hearts and your eyes to the One who was lifted up on the cross for you. Set your hearts and minds on the hope and life you have through His resurrection. And no matter what this world may bring, you will be above and beyond it, in the joy of life through Jesus, our living Lord and Saviour. Amen.