

Getting to Resurrection
Colossians 3: 1 – 4
Makemie Presbyterian Church
February 28, 2010

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³So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

This ends our reading.

Good morning everyone. A few weeks ago Donna Rauch mentioned to me that she was reading *Three Cups of Tea* an autobiography of Greg Mortensen's building of 53 schools in Northern Pakistan, near the China border. I thought I want to read this book. So the other day, after spending time at the hospital visiting Ted, Carolyn & Elaine Barr, I went as I sometimes do to help readjust my mind to better seek the things above, to the bookstore. Well, as I've said at least a million times, I'm a reader. I read a lot. And this book about Greg Mortenson, the son of Lutheran missionaries who was raised in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and who saw

his parents build the first teaching hospital in Moshi and the first school to accept not only the expat children but also the Tanzanian children. He had a good foundation in other words. So when he promised the village leader Haji Ali in Korphe Pakistan that he would return & build a school for the children he knew something of what it would entail. The rest of the book is about how he raises the money, secures teachers & becomes a diplomat to the various bureaucrats necessary to allow the education of Pakistan children to occur, while the Indians' & Pakistanis' defend their high altitude borders, lobbing shells back & forth.

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. This area in Northern Pakistan is where mountain climbers come from around our world to climb K2 & many of the other high peaks. That's how Greg came to be in this region. Now, we are in our second week of Lent, going the road towards Holy Week, and then the victory of Easter. The days ahead can be dark, especially Maundy Thursday, when Christ is betrayed with a kiss, and Good Friday, the day he is crucified. And this road is necessary because out of the darkness comes the glow of dawn, the resurrection. And it is this signaling of the hope to come that makes the reading of *Three Cups of Tea* a recommended endeavor for this season.

I think because Dr. Greg was raised with Christ, along with his parents example that he believes, a person can accomplish anything they set their mind to. This utter faith in human nature guided by God is just the opening of the page, the beginning of the glow that overcomes despair. There is no better investment than people. To be a minister means that you believe this with all your heart. Last week the ministers in the Snow Hill area had lunch & I showed them the bulletin I had pulled together using cover art taken from Google images. It has a glow about Christ's head. None of us could say, who the painter was, but it is clearly a masterpiece, maybe one of you might know.

It's an old painting, probably four or five hundred years old. When I was searching for cover art I began to wonder, where are the new paintings of Christ? We don't have many new paintings of Jesus, I wonder why? Maybe the public rejects new religious art. I know in some cases it's true. I have a friend who some years ago was the chaplain for a Roman Catholic retreat center. He was told to commission a painting of the Virgin Mary to hang in a prominent place in the gathering room of the center, & so he did.

But when his superiors came & saw this new painting they not only removed the art from the room, they also removed my friend from his post.

They said he was not competent to hold the position. The painting depicted Mary in her mid-teens as she probably was at the birth of Jesus & very pregnant. To my view, the Mary of this painting was about eight months pregnant & the officials said it was irreverent. I told my friend that Luke said that Mary was “great with child.” He said, “That’s what I thought.” But he got the hook.

When I was at this retreat center later, I saw the painting they had put up in its place. It was still Mary, the Virgin Mary, beautiful, but she looked about thirty years old, almost like a movie star. That’s the Mary they wanted, not the other.

But back to this masterwork that is now the cover for the Good Friday bulletin. Even on the cross with his bowed in death & dried blood on his face – his face is shining. And I react to this. Why have his face shining? Did the painter think Jesus glowed in the dark?

Nah. What the painter was trying to do, I think was to show in art that the only way you can really know Jesus is through Easter, that the only way you can really know Jesus Christ is through the resurrection. Through the lens of resurrection, we look upon Jesus in all phases of his life & we see on him the glow of resurrection. If we look back over his whole life, even his

infancy, the glow was there because as the artist, were testifying, he will overcome death & live again!

It's all about hope, do you see? Like bringing schools to where many people said, it was impossible, preposterous, would never, ever happen. But we are raised in Christ, to hope, to believe & to use our faith to help things happen. Now our scripture this morning, the church to which our text was addressed, the church at Colossae in what is today Turkey, heard those words about being raised with Christ, & they didn't know what to do with them either. "You have been raised with Christ. Seek the things that are above." How do you seek the things that are above? The church at Colossae began by becoming fascinated with what they call "mysterious things," something like the ancient counterpart to fortune telling. They began to be involved with something like the psychic readings they advertise on Television. They were interested in seeing into the future, maybe even communing with the dead. "If we are going to seek the things that are above & leave behind the things that are on the earth" they thought, "then we have to be involved with things that are really unusual."

So they became a very unusual church; they became fascinated by things that no one else understood. They had a practice that is hard to translate from the Greek. Nobody really knows how to translate it, but I'll

try: they “walked in the middle of the air” I don’t know, but they had experiences of elevation.

“Seek the things that are above,” the scripture said & they replied, “Hey! We’ve been raised with Christ. We are not like we used to be,” & to prove it they had some kind of ceremony of elevation that they called “walking in the middle of the air.”

What is more, they said, “We have been raised with Christ, so we must be morally & ethically rigorous.” Thus, they had a little motto: “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.”

You can just see it now – A+ for their religious rigor. These people were really taking it seriously.

And so Paul wrote to them & said, “All that stuff you’re doing (he didn’t really say `stuff’), it has a show of religion & I’m sure you all are amazing a lot of people. I’m sure they are really fascinated by how deeply, sincerely religious you are, but I want you to know, it doesn’t amount to a hill of beans.”

Paul said, “What you’re doing is self-serving, self-promoting, & spiritually egotistical & it has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. You are simply doing your own thing & calling it `being really religious.’”

And so the question remains: If the people at Colossae got it wrong, then how does it show if we have been raised with Christ? When you go to ball practice, when you go to school, when you go among your friends, when you go to work, how does it show?

Paul said, "Do you remember when you were baptized? Do you remember the ritual of your baptism? You had some old ragged clothes & then there were some beautiful white clothes. When you were baptized you left behind the old rags. Do remember what the old rags represented? The every things that you were taking off your life, getting rid of in your life."

What are those things? Paul names them. Greed? Take off the greed. Sexual misconduct? Cast it off. Malicious talk against other people? Take it off. Gossip? Throw it away. Profanity & vulgar speech? Get rid of it. That was the old.

Paul goes on to say, "Do you remember on the other side of your baptism you put on new clothes? Clean, white clothes? Do you remember what those were? Compassion? Put it on. Be kind to people? Put it on. Humility? Put it on. Put on forgiveness; put on love. Once you have been raised with Christ, you don't wear the old rags anymore. You wear the new

clothes of resurrection: compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness & love.”

Friends, I’m asking you. Is that true? Is it true? Should we just try to be more religious than other people, get some rules & regulations, walk in the middle of the air & do a lot of unusual things so that people will say, “Oh my! Aren’t they sincere?” Or are we to show it in the normal course of life that we are people of the resurrection?

In the book *Three Cups of Tea* there are a few photographs of the children as they attend their new school. In these photos, I swear, I can see a glow around these young learners.

If somebody were to take our picture as somebody who has been raised with Christ, would we literally glow? Of course not! But then again, if somebody took our picture as a child of the resurrection would we glow? Of course we would. The ancient artists were right about the resurrection glow. Amen.