

Hidden in Christ
Colossians 3:1-11
July 31, 2022

About a week ago, I visited Doris Steffy, who had spent a week in the hospital due to Covid and was now home. Doris was weak, but we talked a bit, I read scripture (“I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?” Psalm 121) and prayed with her. Afterwards, I went into the kitchen, and Anne Morrison and Betty Evert were there, soon joined by Annie Stitt. We chatted around the kitchen table. To me, there is something holy and sweet, as the person is struggling with life, friends and family gather nearby to talk, share stories, laugh and perhaps cry.

Anne Morrison told me she came into Doris’ bedroom the day before and Doris was singing. Mind you, Doris never sings hymns in church, Anne said. But here she was lying in bed and singing “Love Lifted Me.” At the last words of the chorus, she raised her arms over her head as she sang “Love Lifted Me.”

I told them I didn’t know it, and Anne and Betty at the table began to sing (turn to choir member to have sing):

I was sinking deep in sin
Far from the peaceful shore
Very deeply stained within
Sinking to rise no more
But the master of the sea Heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me
Now safe am I

Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help
Love lifted me
Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help
Love lifted me

Our scripture passage this morning says there are two truths for us as followers of Christ: we have been raised up with Christ (love lifted me!) AND we are hidden with Christ. Before Chuck reads our scripture passage found in your bulletin, let us pray.

Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Colossians 3:1-11

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Last Sunday, I attended a birthday party for one of our members who had turned 100: Phyllis Moore. A person at the party asked me what I was preaching on this Sunday. I said, "The theme is we are hidden in God."

"Oh, a mystery!" she said, "I love mysteries. They are about hidden things."

As I prepared for this message, I discovered that hidden in Christ is a mystery. What does that mean? Originally, I had chosen this theme because of the quote on the front of your bulletin.

"A woman's heart should be so hidden in Christ that a man has to seek Him just to find her."

I love this quote, and I have adopted it as a theme for my life. A little more on that later, but what does hidden in Christ mean?

The word itself hidden means kept out of sight, concealed. Hidden in Christ seems like such a strange term, but it means that you are safe and secure in Christ. This means that nothing can snatch you out of Christ's hand. Think of Romans 8 that says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing can separate us from God's love. Why? Because we are hidden in Christ. And where is Christ? Christ has been lifted up and seated at the right hand of God. Therefore, we are raised in Christ. Being hidden in Christ means that your identity has been established, not based on anything that you have done, but upon what Christ has done for you.

A common misconception is that our faith is all up to you or me, that we are the ones who need to take the first step with God. But the Bible doesn't teach this. For example, God called the people of Israel – they didn't choose God; God chose them. God called the prophets and gave them their voice; Jesus called his disciples and made them part of his kingdom. He said to them, "You didn't choose me, but I chose you..." (John 15:16)

God is the One who chooses first. Our role is to respond in faith – to say, in the words of Samuel, "Speak; for your servant hears." (1 Samuel 3:9) ... or Isaiah, who said, "Here I am. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:6) ... or the father who begged Jesus to heal his sick child, "(Lord,) I believe. Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

We respond to being chosen first by God. Nothing can separate us from God's love because we are hidden.

Our passage then moves from our status (raised and hidden) to the realm within. If you are raised and hidden in Christ, then live it. Be worthy of it. Hidden in Christ means not only being safe and secure in God's love (who chooses us first), it also means becoming more like Christ.

While contemplating what hidden in Christ means and reading the passage over and over, I was working on getting groceries to my 100-year-old mother who lives in Minnesota. I had ordered them on Saturday, and they were to be delivered on Monday. I got a message they had been delivered, and I called my Mom to make sure everything was okay.

She hadn't received them. I told her to look in the hallway. Nothing. I called down to the desk in the lobby. They hadn't seen anything. So I called the company that did the shopping and delivery. I got someone with a strong foreign accent. We have all been there, right? I could barely understand the man. I explained my mother did not receive her groceries even though it said she had received them.

Fortunately, he could understand me. And fortunately, I could understand some of the words he said and got the gist of it. The groceries came to \$159. He could immediately give credit to my mom's account, but he wasn't authorized to go over \$100. He tried to tell me what he had to do with the \$59, but I couldn't understand him. I asked him to repeat it over and over.

Throughout this process, he kept putting me on hold, and it was taking a long time. While on hold, I had my Bible open in front of me to our scripture passage. I re-read it while on hold: get rid of anger, rage, filthy language.

I am hidden in Christ.

I read further on in Colossians 3: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." I can do this. Even though our phone call took 40 minutes, I had no urge to be angry or say something I shouldn't.

I am hidden in Christ.

After I sort of understood what was happening, I said goodbye, and I noticed I had a phone call. The place where my Mom lives had called back to say that the groceries had been delivered to the independent side of the building; my Mom is in assisted living. They delivered the groceries to her.

Well, that was a relief. Now what do I do? Do I call the company back? I mean, I could do nothing and just keep the \$159 credit for all my trouble. It did cross my mind.

I am hidden in Christ. I am safe and secure in God's love, and I need to act worthy of it.

I called the grocery company back, got a different person with a worse accent. I couldn't understand anything she said. I explained I didn't need the credits. Groceries found. Fortunately, she understood me, and hopefully, they will remove the credit.

What does it mean to be hidden (and raised) in Christ? We bring the kingdom of heaven into our secular experiences. There is a popular saying: "Don't be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good." Yet, I disagree. We should become more heavenly minded so that we *will* be of earthly good.

We are called to take off the old self and put on the new self – the new self that is hidden in Christ. The self more like Christ.

Our scripture passage ends with verse 11, but Verse 12 tells us what it looks like when we put on the new self. It says clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, gentleness. Wear them proudly. We are to make choices in the light of who we are. We are to become more and more like Christ because we are hidden in Christ. Our identity is not found in what people think about us. Our identity is found in Christ alone.

Which leads us back to the saying on the front of the bulletin:

"A woman's heart should be so hidden in Christ that a man has to seek Him just to find her."

This quote explains who I am, or perhaps I should say, how I wish to be. When people meet me, I hope they see Christ. And to really get to know me, you will need to get to know my Savior.

So every morning as I drive to church, I say a prayer. I have shared this prayer often, but here it is again because I wish to be hidden in Christ:

I rise from my bed this day to adore your holy name.

To live for you this day.

To work with you in the building of your kingdom.

I consciously renew my call at the beginning of this day, grateful I can serve you in such a way.

Heavenly Father, I pray this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus Christ, I pray this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray this day you will fill me with all your fullness and your fruit will ripen within me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Holy, blessed, glorious Trinity, three person in one, have mercy on me.

Then I pray for others:

Tend the sick, dear Christ, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous. And for your love's sake. Amen.

Now, let us stand and say our affirmation of faith in Christ which comes from a prayer known as St Patrick's Breastplate. It asks us to be hidden in Christ.

**Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.**

**I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.**

