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Hidden with Christ – Colossians 3:1-13

A widow in a church long ago once told me about her late husband, who had been raised in a very strict Baptist home. They had a print of Jesus' face in their bedroom, and every night of their marriage, as they retired, he turned that picture to the wall.

Hidden *with* Christ in God, not hidden *from* Christ.

I remember as a very young child listening to my Mom coming upstairs to get me out of bed. I wanted to stay in bed. And I thought that if I pulled my blankets up over my head, Mom would think I was still sleeping and leave me alone. I don't know anyone who sleeps with a blanket over their head; I don't know where the idea that Mom might think I was still asleep because my blanket was over my head could have come from. But somehow, now, I think it might have been some sort of childish association between sleeping and hiding.

Paul's first words are where we begin today. His letter to the church in Colossae begins with thanksgiving for all they are and have become because of Jesus Christ: they are a vibrant, faithful community.

But Paul never wastes an opportunity when he writes to teach and encourage churches in the inevitable difficulties they face. So, just before today's passage, he reminds them that their life is in Christ, the risen Christ, since through their baptism they mystically died with Christ and are now new beings, transformed by Christ.

Then there's this short passage, which is about the reassuring comfort of being bound together in the body of Christ: (vv. 1-3).

"Hidden with Christ in God." That's stuck with me for a long time. There's something about it. There's something about this business of hiding that's important.

Why do people hide? And what do they hide from? Adam and Eve tried to hide from God in the Garden; that's certainly not anything new. Too often people have to hide from those who would kill or harm them. Think of the Jews and others hidden during the Holocaust; the Christians being hidden even now; those who are fleeing shooters and terrorists.

Hiding is a way of seeking safety, or at least feeling safe, from whatever is out there, real or imagined. People hide to relieve the pressures of the world – not just life-threatening ones, though sometimes those pressures may feel deadly. Sometimes, it's the pressure of being around people. You extroverts won't get this, but stick with me. Sometimes people just want to get away from people, be alone.

Did you have a hiding place?

As a kid, I spent a lot of time alone, and had a couple of special places where I felt safe and hidden. One was in my parent's store: thinking back, that store was an odd place, at least the back half, behind the file cabinets – full of parts and pieces and the things my Dad used to fix things for people.

There was an old counter running front to back there, along one wall of shelves, and some cardboard boxes behind it at the end where it butted up against a file cabinet. I'd go back there, sit on the floor with those relatively soft boxes at my back, and read for hours. I read *The Red Badge of Courage* there. I felt, in a good way, like no one knew where I was, and it was my space – hiding, at least sort of.

Then, outdoors, there was this place I used to climb up to on a roof under the eaves of a cottage on my parents' property. No one knew I went there; but it, too, was a place apart, a place where I could get away from other kids when I needed to, a place where I could be by myself and read or whittle or just think. Or watch the squirrels in the big maple tree.

You could see me easily if you knew where to look; but no one ever did, and even though I wasn't concealed, I was, in my mind, hidden.

Now, you have to understand that I'm one of those people who has been blessed with a sense of God's presence. I can't remember when it

began, but somehow I've just known that God *is*. Maybe you're like that; everyone's a bit different, though, and that's how I am.

And I don't really know when it was that I realized that even when I was in my little hiding places all alone, I wasn't all alone. I was never alone. Neither are you. Wherever you are, Christ is with you. Wherever I am, Christ is with me. Oh, we may forget from time to time, even most of the time; but Christ is still there.

Which is why this declaration of Paul's is so important. Whatever reason I felt I needed to be alone, I never really was. Whatever compelled me to hide didn't matter, because I was – you are – already hidden, hidden with Christ in God. In your baptism, which united you with Christ, you were hidden with Christ, in God: protected from whatever might happen around us.

There is this tiny piece inside each of us: our soul, our true self, which is hidden even from those closest to us – perhaps from ourselves. That's the part that is hidden with Christ in God, this tiny spark of God within us. No matter the storms that rage around and about us, nothing can get in there, not in the toughest moments, because that part is God's, and like a parent sheltering a child with their body in the corner of a bathtub during a tornado, Christ covers us, protects us. Christ hides us from the threat. That bit, nothing can touch.

It's hidden, not yet revealed.

Think of wherever it was that you went when things got to be too much, whether it was a physical place or some corner of your mind. Remember how safe, how comfortable it was there. That's a little bit of what it is to be hidden with Christ in God, place we never have to leave.

And when the storm of life passes, that piece inside us that Christ protects will be revealed. We will be revealed. We'll be found, each of us found with Christ, and there will be rejoicing. Paul says, "When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also be revealed with him in glory."

The rest of Paul's whole letter to this church he hadn't even visited is his explanation of what this means for them and us, how we should live once we realize we are hidden with Christ in God, and our ultimate safety is guaranteed:

"So put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire and greed (which is idolatry). The wrath of God is coming on disobedient people because of these things. You used to live this way, when you were alive to these things. But now set aside these things, such as anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language. Don't lie to each other. Take off the old human nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge by conforming to the image of the one who created it. In this image, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is in all things and in all people.

“Therefore, as God’s choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.”

Get rid of all this stuff we just do, and instead do the things, the good things, that are hard – be compassionate, show kindness and humility, be gentle and patient. And the really difficult part: forgive. As the Lord forgave you, forgive each other.

These things take effort, but God loves them, they are of God, and God uses them to heal us.

Paul says, “Christ is in all things and in all people.” Christ is in you and me. Our actions can be holy because God can make them so. God is not far off; we can’t hide from him, can’t just turn the picture around – because we are already hidden in him. So, what we do should come from our gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ: made all things new – even if we cannot see that now, with our blankets pulled up over our heads, hoping to sleep a little longer.

God is not asleep, and God knows we aren’t, either. God calls us to rise and shine, put on these holy virtues worthy of God’s own

children, you and me. Just because we are hidden with Christ in God doesn't mean we can't let God's light shine.