8th Sunday after Pentecost (L18C) – August 3, 2025 Pastor Chris Repp
Colossians 3:1-11 Grace Lutheran Church, Champaign, Illinois

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.
Today's readings are hitting kind of close to home for me. As most of you know, I've just spent three weeks at the house I grew up in, and where my mother still lives, sorting through 58 years of my parents accumulated stuff with my mom and sisters. With Dad having died 16 months ago, there is no clearer illustration of the fact that you "can't take it with you," that the physical things you accumulate on this side of the grave will become someone else's. Many of you have been through this exercise yourself, not only with your parents' stuff, but with your own. This is a reality we all face sooner or later, and our readings hit this theme forcefully. But there is value in confronting this reality, because it pushes us to seek out the good news that is hiding in our second reading from Colossians. Let's see if we can tease that out.

Those of you who have participated in On The Way here at Grace will remember how we reflect on biblical texts there. We look first for what is bad news in the text, and then for what the good news might be that addresses that bad news. And if you do that exercise on a regular basis, you will also notice some our readings don't have any good news in them. Today's first reading from Ecclesiastes is a case in point. There is no good news here. There is only hopelessness and despair. But it is hopelessness and despair of a certain kind. Notice what the writer despairs of. This is not the despair of Rachel "weeping for her children because they are no more," the passage Matthew quotes to convey the grief of those whose children were slaughtered by Herod at the time of Jesus' birth, grief that is echoed today in places like Gaza, Ukraine, Yemen, or closer to home in the Hill Country of Texas.[1] This is a grumpy, and apparently "successful" old man, bitterly complaining that he can't take with him to the grave all the wealth he accumulated in this life by his wisdom and hard work. Somebody else will get all that, someone who hasn't worked for it. And he resents that.

Then Psalm 49 piles on: "For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish and leave their wealth to those who come after them. Their graves shall be their homes forever… though they had named *lands* after themselves." The lectionary folks have given us only the first half of this Psalm. It gets better later. But I think I see what they had in mind. They're reinforcing the bad news of the Ecclesiastes reading and giving the later readings a chance to answer with some good news.

That good news doesn't come in our Gospel reading, though. (Maybe for the sake of the gospel we should have switched our last two readings today?) The rich man in Jesus' parable is not grumpy or despairing. He is blissfully unaware of what is coming, fully invested in his good life – so invested that he can't see beyond himself. When he has a bumper crop, he does not share his abundance with the less fortunate around him. Those folks might not even have crossed his mind. They're not even mentioned in the story. But of course they were there. Jesus has been talking about the poor a lot in Luke's gospel, right from the very beginning. So, in the minds of Jesus' hearers and Luke's audience, the poor would have been front and center, silent characters looking on. Maybe Jesus meant to signal that the inheritance that the two brothers were fighting over at the beginning of our reading was like the wealth of the rich man in the story that follows: the selfish accumulation of wealth not shared with others. And here the brothers were, following in their father's footsteps, each also focused only on themselves.

[1] See Matthew 2:18, citing Jeremiah 31:15.

Finally we can turn to the good news in Colossians. But you have to look closely, because even here it is followed by more bad news. So, here's the good news: "You have died." Wait, what? Hold on. "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." And then this: "When Christ *who is your life* is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." We've got another funeral coming up this week, and one of the key components of our funeral service is the Thanksgiving for Baptism that takes place at the beginning, with the remains of the deceased right next to the baptismal font, sprinkled with water from the bowl. "When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death," we declare. This is a quote from Romans chapter 6, which then continues, "…if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Baptism into Christ is baptism into his death. This is what Colossians has in mind when it says, "You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

But because Christ did not stay dead, baptism into Christ is also baptism into his resurrection. And that's what the Colossians text means by saying, "when Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." Now this *could* be taken as a "pie in the sky by and by" sort of text, as if to say, "when Christ returns at the end of time, long after you're dead, you will be raised and live with him in glory." I dare say it is often read that way. And I don't want to deny that meaning, because it's really good news for dead people, (like my dad, for instance,) and for the dead people we will all someday be. But Colossians is focused more our lives on this side of the grave, lived that are already being lived, right here and right now, in the reality of Jesus' resurrection life.

Because Christ is not only revealed at end of time. On the third day after his crucifixion he was revealed to his disciples, and then to others. And then, right at the end of Luke's Gospel, he revealed himself to other disciples through a survey of the Scriptures and then in the breaking of the bread. That's what we're singing about in our communion hymn, "Be Known To Us, Lord Jesus." It is Luke's way of telling us that Christ is also revealing himself every time we gather on the day of his resurrection around the reading of scripture and the breaking of the bread in holy communion. Christ is our life right now, says our Colossians text, hidden with Christ in God. And Jesus Christ is already being revealed in and through us by faith.

That happens whenever we remember the promise of our baptism, that we belong to Christ, that we are beloved children of God, heirs and agents of God's encroaching reign, joined to the life he died to give us. Christ is revealed in us when, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we trust the promise of our baptism, and that faith moves us to share our abundance with those around us. Christ is revealed in us whenever that faith leads us to reject the forces of evil that defy God and God's love for the world, whenever we refuse to collaborate with the powers of this world that rebel against God and appeal to our fears, our insecurities, and our selfishness. Christ's life is revealed in us whenever we refuse to give up hope in the face of overwhelming evil and disaster in the world, in the face of hate and bigotry, in the face of cruelty, injustice, and oppression. Christ is revealed in us when we live with hope and gratitude, confident that God is with us, working to make all things new.

May we trust that good news in the face of all the bad news around us these days. And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.