

The Cure to Life and Death
(from today's Epistle" Colossians iii.1.ff.)

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Our faith in Jesus Christ is based primarily on two events in history which the Gospel accounts labor very hard to prove: He died on the Cross; He rose again from the dead. It's not that His birth isn't important, because the theme of His Nativity, as we know, is a significant season in the Church calendar. And it's not as if His life and teaching and miracles are deprived of value. No, they are testimonies of His divinity, and therefore a critical part of what we study for our own benefit, and proclaim to others to convince them of who Christ really is. And it's not as if His Ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, and His promise to return are in any way diminished as vital components of our faith and belief. But without His death —proven, attested to, thoroughly witnessed by many and varied parties, described in graphic detail— our sins have not been remitted, and the price for our redemption has not been paid.

But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth, that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled ... (Jn. 19:34-35)

We are looking at death. Real death. Death in any way you may choose to try to comprehend it. Jesus died, taking with Him the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). Those who die in their own sins face everlasting separation from God. This is the awful fate from which we are delivered by Christ's death on our behalf.

But Jesus also was resurrected. Had He only died, and not been raised from the dead, His mission of salvation would have been incomplete. The mystery and uncertainty of inevitable death is the backdrop of all existence, however we may shove the matter aside. It is that incomprehensible, unpredictable, and somehow grossly unfair event that visits each and every life. But on Easter morning, something entirely unprecedented occurred:

[quoting St. Paul} For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

All who had witnessed Christ's death were certainly thoroughly familiar with the reality of death, whether from natural causes, or through accidents, or even the violent means of execution such as crucifixion. But being raised from the dead is completely outside the normal course of events. The disciples had no framework of experience from which they could reference what met all of

their five senses early that day. Neither did reason permit such an event, although it had been foretold to them many times.

This was a true, actual resurrection. It wasn't some sort of symbolic victory over evil, as many today who scorn the Scriptures would suggest. It wasn't the triumph of a noble idea, a principle, that survived the death of its chief proponent by being carried on by his followers. It wasn't a figurative example of the indomitable nature of the human spirit.

But how is all of this brought down to where you and I dwell? Let me put it simply and a bit paradoxically: the cure to life is death, and the cure to death is life. Before I became a believer in Jesus Christ, I didn't realize it, but I was heading — as is every single life — on a collision course with death. My own downhill spiral was dramatic and it seemed to gain continual momentum. So many people, it seems, manage however to artfully, cleverly, and successfully put off the inevitable. But my life was filled with crisis, and my efforts to assert control over it were fruitless. I needed to die. That man which represented what I once was, living totally apart from God, needed to meet his demise. "Stop!" was the only command that would have availed. Had I won the day in my race to destruction, however, and had not God intervened, it would have been a very sad death from which no rescue from any source would have been possible. How many of such tales occur every day? You know, as well as I.

But look at today's Epistle: *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* Dead! Hallelujah, the very thing I was seeking and desperately needed! My sin would have destroyed me, for even in the best and most well-ordered of lives, the ultimate operative principal is sin, *for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). The death that I was in such great need of, God, in His great kindness, supplied me, through my identification with the death of His Son upon the Cross. Again, the cure to life is death.

Alright, then. I have died. But here I am, alive. How can this be? Again, quoting St. Paul:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesli I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
(Gal. 2:20)

It is the resurrection life of Christ that now fills my heart, my spirit, my body, and will some day overflow to life eternal... , life that will survive the grave, just as Christ survived the grave. The cure to death is life. I am risen with Christ. Though I am *dead*, as our text says — dead to the sin, selfishness, self-gratification, self-preservation — those things I used to live by, *my life* [as a believer] *is hid with Christ in God*. Hidden means secure, safe, and untouchable by *him that had the power of death, that is, the devil* (Heb. 2:14). This resurrection life is also hidden in the sense that what and who we truly are as God's people, dead to sin and alive in Him, is largely invisible, both to our own eyes and those of others:

-Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is . (1 In. 3:2)

-When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (the Epistle)

... then shall I know even as I know even as also I am known ... (1 Cor. 13: 12)

Our text today also includes some very practical instructions for those who have indeed died with Christ, and now live with Him: ... *seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.* Let me put it this way: every order of Creation seeks the context in which it was made to function. Seeds seek fertile soil. A fish out of water would seek the water, if it could. Birds seek the air. Animals seek the forests or the fields. But what are we to seek, as believers born again through the power of God's Spirit, those who have passed through death with Christ, and onward together with Him in His resurrection? We are to seek that place where our hearts rightfully belong, and where our souls, are resurrected bodies, will some day permanently , and actually, dwell. It is certainly not here, on the earth; it is *above*. How do we do this? We can neither see Christ, nor those places above that we have yet to occupy. This is the work of faith, and it is a lifelong work.

What do I too often find myself searching for, in actuality? Why, the same things that preoccupy everyone else in the world, which they would proclaim are their sources of life: security in retirement; recognition; more material goods; sources of pleasure and entertainment, including ones that that are detrimental to my faith; the opinions and affirmations of the rich and famous, and on goes the list. No, if I am to fulfill the spirit of today's Epistle, I must turn away from what is around me, because it crowds me for its attention, and deliberately look upward. And that's where I must keep my gaze focused, even if it is embarrassing to do so by today's standards, and makes me a marked man: marked by the absence of those things that have come to characterize contemporary life. Is this a price I am willing to pay? But since I died with Christ (Ro. 6:8) and have been raised with Him, shall I go backward, and try to undo the work Christ has done for me?

As a church, a central part of our mission is helping to provide each other a context for this resurrected life. We won't find it anywhere else. The world is fast abandoning even the memory of these things. I wish I could say that fulfilling this mission is not a desperate struggle and fight, but that wouldn't be so.

This morning we proclaim His resurrection: a real one, from a real death. Many other churches throughout the world are doing the same. May God help us in this hour, through our lives and our words, to be absolutely faithful to Him under the very circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.