

"THE CROSS OF GLORY: VICTORY!"
COLOSSIANS 3:1-4
THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MARCH 31, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: COL 3:1-4

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

EASTER IS LIKE FINDING SOMETHING HIDDEN. FOR EXAMPLE,
IT'S LIKE A CHILD FINDING AN EASTER EGG AFTER ALL THE EGGS
WERE THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN FOUND. IT'S LIKE FINDING A GIFT
PLACED UNDER A PILLOW WHEN IT SEEMED THAT THE BIRTHDAY OR
ANNIVERSARY HAD BEEN OVERLOOKED OR FORGOTTEN. IT'S A GOD-
GIVEN GIFT WRAPPED IN SUCH A WAY THAT NOBODY RECOGNIZES IT
AS A GIFT UNTIL IT'S UNWRAPPED AND SUDDENLY REVEALED TO BE
OF PRICELESS WORTH. EASTER IS LIKE THAT—A GRAND AND
GLORIOUS SURPRISE!

JESUS WAS LIKE THAT. NOBODY HAD REALLY UNDERSTOOD
WITH WHOM THEY HAD WALKED AND TALKED DURING THE YEARS OF
HIS MINISTRY. HIS WORDS HAD CERTAINLY COMMUNICATED DEEP
WISDOM. HE HAD CERTAINLY TAUGHT WITH AUTHORITY. HIS DEEDS
HAD BEEN MIGHTY. JESUS HAD A SENSE OF BEING THAT PEOPLE
HAD NOT ENCOUNTERED BEFORE.

YET THROUGHOUT JESUS' EXTRAORDINARY MINISTRY SOMETHING REMAINED HIDDEN WITHIN HIM. PETER HAD NOT REALLY UNCOVERED IT, ALTHOUGH HE CONFESSED JESUS TO BE THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD. EVEN MARY, WHO HAD BORNE AND RAISED HIM, REMAINED MYSTIFIED BY THE STRANGE QUALITY IN JESUS THAT SET HIM APART FROM OTHERS.

BUT IF THERE HAD BEEN MYSTERY IN HIS LIVING, IT WAS ONLY MAGNIFIED BY HIS DYING. THAT DAY MUST HAVE REMOVED ANY LINGERING NOTION THAT GOD HAD HIDDEN ANY SPECIAL GIFT IN THIS PACKAGE OF HUMAN FLESH. HOW COULD A DEATH-WRAPPED MAN CONTAIN A GIFT FROM GOD? I MEAN, IF THE CRADLE WAS HARD TO COMPREHEND, THE CROSS WAS EVEN HARDER. IF GOD HAD INTENDED TO MAKE A GIFT OF JESUS, HIS INTENTIONS WERE SURELY BENT OUT OF SHAPE BY SINFUL HUMAN DEEDS THAT REDUCED THE INTENDED GIFT TO A MERE MORTAL, DEATH-BOUND HUMAN BEING.

YOU KNOW, IT'S REALLY UNFORTUNATE FOR US IN SOME WAYS THAT WE ALREADY KNOW ON GOOD FRIDAY WHAT WILL HAPPEN THREE DAYS LATER. WE PREPARE FOR THE EASTER MEAL AND LAY OUT OUR EASTER CLOTHING ALREADY DURING THE DAYS OF THIS HIDDENNESS IN THE GRAVE AS THOUGH ONE CAN JUST NATURALLY EXPECT JESUS TO BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

THIS IS VERY DECEITFUL, HOWEVER, FOR IT KEEPS US FROM A FULL REALIZATION OF THE DREADFUL AWFULNESS OF GOOD FRIDAY AND HOLY SATURDAY AS IT WAS EXPERIENCED BY JESUS' DISCIPLES AND FRIENDS. FOR THEM, THE DAYS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION WERE NOT SPENT IN ANTICIPATION AND PREPARATION, EXCEPT FOR THE WOMEN WHO MADE PREPARATIONS TO ANOINT JESUS' DEAD BODY. INSTEAD, THEY WERE DAYS OF DARKNESS IN WHICH THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD DISCERNED IN JESUS LAY MOST DEEPLY HIDDEN. THEY THEMSELVES WENT INTO HIDING SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT ALSO BE CAUGHT BY THOSE WHO HAD CRUCIFIED JESUS.

BUT THE STARK CONTRAST BETWEEN THEIR HOPELESSNESS AND DESPAIR IN THE DAYS AFTER GOOD FRIDAY AND THE GLORIOUS WONDER OF THE ANGELIC QUESTION, "WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?" MARKS THE JOY OF THIS EASTER DAY. ONLY WHEN YOU KNOW CLEARLY THAT THIS MAN IS DEAD AND YOU NEVER AGAIN EXPECT TO SEE HIM ON EARTH, DOES YOUR HEART JUMP WITH THE UNIQUE JOY OF EASTER WHEN HE REAPPEARS FROM THE GRAVE. ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE HEARD THE MOURNFUL WORDS OF THOSE WHO HAD TAKEN HIS LIFELESS BODY DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND PREPARED IT ALL TOO HASTILY FOR BURIAL IN A BORROWED TOMB, DO YOU GET SOME IDEA OF THE EMOTIONS OF THIS DAY, WHEN HE SUDDENLY APPEARS ALIVE AGAIN TO MARY MAGDALENE, TO

PETER, TO THE MEN ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS, AND TO THE ELEVEN GATHERED BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. THESE PEOPLE HAD NO EXPECTATION FOR EASTER, EVEN THOUGH JESUS HAD TOLD THEM IT WOULD HAPPEN SEVERAL TIMES.

INTO SUCH A STATE OF AFFAIRS JESUS SUDDENLY REAPPEARS. HE APPEARS TO MARY AND TO PETER. HE IS WALKING AND TALKING WITH THE TWO DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS, ASKING ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT SEEMED TO HAVE DISTURBED THEM SO MUCH, AS THOUGH HE WERE A CURIOUS INQUISITOR. THEN SUDDENLY HE BECOMES AN INTERPRETER. IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD IT BECAME PLAIN TO THEM THAT IN CHRIST GOD HAD BEEN PRESENT AMONG THEM—HIDDEN, TO BE SURE, BUT WORKING SOMETHING OUT AMONG THEM THAT THEY HAD NEVER QUITE SEEN OR REALIZED. HE WAS THE SPECIALLY CHOSEN ONE IN WHOSE LIFE AND DEATH EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE HAD BEEN REARRANGED. IF DEATH NO LONGER HAD THE LAST SAY ON EARTH, THEN ONE'S WHOLE ASSESSMENT OF HOW THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH FUNCTION HAD TO CHANGE.

TODAY'S TEXT SAYS THE VERY SAME THING: "SINCE, THEN, YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST, SET YOUR HEARTS ON THINGS ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (V 1). THROUGH CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, WE GET A BRAND-NEW VIEW OF THINGS. WHEN WE ARE JOINED TO HIS RESURRECTION, AS ST.

PAUL SAYS WE ARE IN HOLY BAPTISM, WE GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE AND A NEW POWER FOR LIVING. EVERYTHING THAT ONCE SEEMED TRUE MUST NOW BE EXCHANGED FOR A NEW TRUTH.

LET'S PUT IT THIS WAY: THROUGH THE RESURRECTION, YOU NOW SEE THE FUTURE IN TERMS OF LIFE, WHEN AT ONE TIME IT ALL SEEMED TO POINT TO DEATH. IF GOD BROUGHT JESUS BACK FROM THE DEAD, THEN YOU CAN BE SURE THAT HE WILL ALSO BRING YOU THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF DEATH INTO THE SAME KIND OF RESURRECTION WHEN YOU HIDE YOURSELF UNDER THE WINGS OF CHRIST. DEATH REMAINS A MONSTER AMONG US, FOR SURE, BUT IT HAS NO LAST OR ULTIMATE WORD TO SAY TO US, FOR "YOUR LIFE IS NOW HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD," AS ST. PAUL TELLS US (V 3). DEATH CANNOT INTIMIDATE YOU WHEN YOUR LIFE IS INVIGORATED WITH THE POWERS THAT ARE STRONGER THAN DEATH. WHEN "YOUR LIFE IS NOW HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD," THE SAME POWERS THAT PROTECTED JESUS IN DEATH ALSO PROTECT YOU.

THIS, OF COURSE, CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR YOU IN ALMOST EVERY IMAGINABLE WAY! IF YOUR LIFE IS "HIDDEN IN CHRIST," THEN SURELY YOUR LIFE HERE ON EARTH IS PROTECTED AGAINST EVERYTHING THAT THREATENS YOU BY THE SAME GOD WHO WILL SEE YOU THROUGH DEATH JUST AS HE SAW HIS OWN SON THROUGH DEATH. YOU CAN "SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON EARTHLY THINGS. FOR YOU DIED, AND YOUR LIFE IS NOW HIDDEN WITH

CHRIST IN GOD" (V 2). WE STILL NEED THE THINGS OF THIS EARTH TO SUSTAIN OUR LIFE HERE, BUT THEY ALL LOOK DIFFERENT NOW AND HAVE A DIFFERENT VALUE WHEN WE HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST IN HOLY BAPTISM. BEING JOINED TO CHRIST MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO SET OUR HEARTS ON "THINGS ABOVE."

IT'S HARD TO GRASP THIS WONDER, ISN'T IT? YOU SEEM TO BE SO MUCH LIKE YOU ALWAYS WERE, EVEN THOUGH NOW YOU'RE "HIDDEN IN CHRIST." IT'S AS THOUGH YOU WERE A GIFT WRAPPED BY GOD IN AN ALMOST UNRECOGNIZABLE PACKAGE THAT, WHEN FULLY OPENED, IS THE SIGN AND TOKEN OF HIS PRESENCE AMONG US. WE SAID THAT ABOUT THE CHRIST IN THE BEGINNING, AND NOW WE MUST SPEAK OF OURSELVES AS SUCH A GIFT. WHEN GOD HIDES YOUR LIFE IN CHRIST IN HOLY BAPTISM, HE LEAVES IT WRAPPED IN THAT VIRTUALLY UNRECOGNIZABLE PACKAGE OF YOUR FLESH, BESET AS IT IS WITH SIN AND WEAKNESS AND DEATH.

AND WHAT WE SHALL BE IN THE RESURRECTION HAS NOT YET APPEARED. WHAT WE WANT TO BE AS WE SET OUR HEARTS ON "THINGS ABOVE" IS BY NO MEANS YET REALIZED, AND WE SEEM SO BOUND TO THE THINGS THAT ARE BELOW. IT'S HARD TO THINK OF VICTORY "IN CHRIST" WHEN OUR LIFE AT PRESENT SEEMS TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN A SERIES OF DEFEATS AS WE SIN DAILY, LOSE STRENGTH IN OUR BODY, AND JOURNEY UNFAILINGLY TO THE GRAVE. WHAT WE PRESENTLY EXPERIENCE IS SO FAR FROM WHAT WE WANT TO

BE OR HOPE TO BE THAT WE WOULD DESPAIR WERE IT NOT FOR THE SIMPLE PROMISE: "WHEN CHRIST, WHO IS YOUR LIFE, APPEARS, THEN YOU ALSO WILL APPEAR WITH HIM IN GLORY" (V 4).

EASTER, THEN, IS A CALL TO FAITH IN THE GOD WHO FULFILLED HIS PROMISE TO RAISE JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD AND WHO PROMISES IN THE SAME WAY TO RAISE US FROM THE DEAD WHEN OUR TIME COMES. YET EASTER IS MUCH MORE. IT'S ALSO A CALL TO LIVE "IN CHRIST" RIGHT NOW. THIS NEW LIFE IS SYMBOLIZED BY THE CROSS OF GLORY PORTRAYED BEFORE YOU THIS EASTER MORNING. THE SPLENDID RAYS OF THE SUN ARE SEEN BEHIND THE CROSS, BUT THE SUN ITSELF IS NOT VISIBLE. THIS WILL ALSO BE ILLUSTRATED BY THE TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE SUN ON APRIL 8TH. DURING THE ECLIPSE, THE CORONA OF THE SUN, THE SUN'S "RAYS," WILL BE VISIBLE BUT THE SUN WILL BE HIDDEN BY THE MOON. IN LIKE FASHION, YOUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST IS VISIBLE WHILE YOUR GLORIOUS FUTURE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST, WHO WAS CRUCIFIED AND NOW IS RISEN.

THUS, IN THE GLORY CROSS, WE RECEIVE A GLIMPSE OF THAT GLORIOUS FUTURE IN THE RAYS THAT FLOW FROM THE STILL-UNSEEN SUN TO RISE BEHIND THE CROSS. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS GOD'S PROMISE THAT YOU NOT ONLY WILL BE RAISED ON THE LAST DAY BUT THAT YOU ALREADY ARE RAISED WITH HIM AS YOU ARE JOINED TO HIM IN YOUR BAPTISM AND BY THE FAITH IN WHICH

YOU NOW LIVE. YOUR PRESENT LIFE, HIDDEN IN HIM, GLOWS WITH THE GLORY THAT IS YET TO BE REVEALED IN ITS FULNESS, FOR IT IS SURROUNDED BY THE GLORY OF THE LORD THAT FIRST DAWNED ON THE WORLD IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

THAT'S WHY EASTER IS LIKE SOMETHING HIDDEN AND THEN FOUND. IT'S GOD'S LIFE HIDDEN IN CHRIST, REVEALED FULLY IN THE RESURRECTION, AND FOUND IN US THROUGH OUR BAPTISM. IN OTHER WORDS, EASTER IS LIKE GOD UNWRAPPING A PACKAGE THAT NOBODY REALLY RECOGNIZED AS A GIFT UNTIL HE UNWRAPPED IT, REVEALING IT IN THAT MOMENT TO BE THE GREATEST OF ALL GIFTS WE COULD HOPE FOR. IT'S LIKE GOD UNWRAPPING YOUR LIFE AND SHOWING IT, IN TURN, AS THE HIDING PLACE OF CHRIST, WHO GUARDS YOU FROM POWERS THAT WOULD DESTROY YOU IN LIFE AND DEATH AND WHO THEN EMPOWERS YOUR LIFE TO GO FORTH IN HIS NAME.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, EASTER IS NEW LIFE--*CHRIST'S* LIFE IN WHICH YOU HIDE AND *YOUR* LIFE WITHIN WHICH THE NEW LIFE OF CHRIST HIDES. EASTER IS CHRIST OPENING THE TOMB OF YOUR LIFE AND RAISING YOU TO NEW VISION, NEW HOPE, NEW DEEDS, NEW LIFE. EASTER IS THE GIFT OF AN OPEN TOMB--AND A LIVING CHRIST--AND A NEW YOU. AMEN.