

Hosea 11.1-11

Psalm 107:1-9,43

Colossians 3: 1-11

Luke 12:13-21

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

“When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” The reading from Colossians, and this one sentence gives us both an orientation for life and also an outcome both of which are beyond where we are, and most probably beyond most people’s expectations.

Today’s readings point to, and describe, what ‘being alive’ really means; and ask us to consider a life movement that will enable us to be *“revealed... in glory.”*

St Irenaeus, one of the early Church fathers captured the essence of the Colossians text by saying; *“The glory of God is humanity fully alive and to be fully alive is to glorify God”*.

At the beginning of the reading we are given a key that enables us to appreciate the insights contained in the reading; *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”*; however, that is easier said than done.

To fully appreciate the readings and to grasp an understanding of ourselves *“revealed... in glory”* we will have to be open to knowing anew that which we already know.

The orthodox teaching of the Church by its very nature, its orthodoxy, is at odds with an appreciation of scripture that is alive and present in every age... The “approved”, “standard”, “authorised”, “conformist”, “traditional”, “conventional” and “established” versions hold what we already know; but what is revealed when we are open to knowing anew?

The reading from Colossians is addressed to the church at Colossae, to those already ‘in the know’, and it encourages them to see themselves “in Christ”; to discover and make evident their Christ-likeness.

In verse 1; *“if you have been raised with Christ”* assumes that those in the church have encountered and engaged in the movement of resurrection for themselves. So now let’s ‘un-know’ resurrection as being something special done by someone special at the first Easter event; and let’s know the transformation of resurrection for ourselves, the movement from the tomb of humanity into the garden of Divine creation.

The Church can sometimes be a confusing and contradicting experience, on the one hand much of our language and so too the shaping of our theological understanding is aimed the special nature, the divinity of Christ; and then on the other hand, we’re asked to claim for ourselves that “we are the body of Christ”!

Today’s reading from Colossians has no contradiction and nor confusion, for it does not create any separation between Christ and the members of the Church; *“Christ is all and in all!”*[v.11]

We’ve heard that before: *“the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”*[John 1:14]

And today we're asked to know it anew: and know it as a reality of ourselves; "*When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*"

There is a story that gives us an appreciation of the dynamic, and the theology that is evident in today's readings, some of us have heard it before but let's hear it again in light of reading of Paul's letter to this church:

THE RABBI'S GIFT
The Different Drum Version
by Dr. M. Scott Peck *

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of antimonastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age. Clearly it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his hermitage. "The rabbi is in the woods, the rabbi is in the woods again " they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the abbot at one such time to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he exclaimed. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old abbot and the old rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the abbot said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "Well what did the rabbi say?" "He couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving --it was something cryptic-- was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times.

But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Elred. But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah. Of course the rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.

Perhaps, as we sit with that story, we might also appreciate that we are not asked to be followers of Christ, nor apostles of Christ; but rather we are called to seek an embodiment, a life and being that is “in Christ’ and so too is at one with all.

Very briefly, the first reading gives us Hosea sharing his insight of God with a primitive audience, an audience that believed it was a centre of the universe and the sun revolved around the earth. It is like a Sunday school story for us that gives us a quite beautiful, almost poetic appreciation of God. And yet it still captures the delightful insight that is the reality expressed by Paul some 800 years later:

Hosea saw; “*I am God.... the Holy One in your midst*”, echoed in the gospel’s “*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*”, and echoed again by Paul in today’s second reading; “*Christ is all and in all!*”[v.11]

Can we embrace an “un-knowing” and begin to contemplate ourselves as “*clothed... with the new self*”; can we contemplate our Christ-likeness?

Hosea appreciates the enormity and the difficulty of this radically new world-view, and view of our own selves; *“My people are bent on turning away from me.”* [v7]

Paul gives us directions to keep our orientation from turning away: *“seek the things that are above.... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”*

Now it is left to us, to determine our orientation, and to imagine ourselves *“clothed... with the new self”*, with our *“new self”* that is clothed ‘in Christ’.

Now it is left to us to discover the treasure of God’s abundance and to discover that *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*[Matthew 6:21]

Peace be with You