

Easter Day 2017

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.”

(Colossians 3.1)

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

Last Sunday – Palm Sunday – the Epistle began with these words: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...who emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant”. In other words, “Try to see things differently. Try to look at people and things with the eyes of the Lord Jesus and remember His great humility and compassion”.

Today’s Epistle definitely picks up from there: “If you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things”. Both of these readings speak of a change that must come within us and within everyone who proclaims to be a Christian. The old way of thinking and living is no longer acceptable – the fits of anger, the unpredictable temper, the jealousy, the foul language, the dirty jokes, the selfish schemes to put ‘me first’ – all of that must be put away. It must be mortified or put to death. We must die to self and be spiritually buried with Christ in order to rise to the new life of His Spirit.

For as much as He physically died on the Cross and rose again, there must be a spiritual death and resurrection in you and me. We were joined, grafted, welded to Him when we were baptized, so we cannot continue to live for ourselves. There must be a change in me, in my desires, and in my priorities – a conversion. Instead of looking down, we must look up. Instead of desiring earthly things, we must seek heavenly things. Instead of praying for MY WILL TO BE DONE, I must begin to yearn for God’s will in all things; and His will includes the “things which are above”.

But how can we know what these things are? If we haven’t been ‘above’ – if we have not been ‘up there’, in Heaven – how can we know? Well, we can know about the ‘things above’ through the natural world – through nature. After all, every aspect and detail of the creation is God’s handiwork. We can also know about the things above through God’s Word in the Bible. It reveals God’s Mind

and Heart, and His purposes. It tells us who He is, and it shows us who we are; and, it helps us to understand our total need for His Mercy, Grace and Truth.

Thirdly, we can better understand heavenly things through the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, Who came down from Heaven and was born as one of us. He took on our humanity but He never stopped being fully Divine. In every way except sin, He was completely human. He was fully God and fully Man. So, through the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and by His Spirit Who dwells in us, we can know the things which are above.

Well, then, what are some of these things? One of them is that little things and little people matter to God. Think of this: the Almighty and Everlasting God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit made Himself small – as small as is humanly possible – when He came down from Heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary. She, herself, was 'little person' by society's standards; and, Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem rather than the bigger city of Jerusalem. These details all emphasize the importance of paying attention to what is small. Let the little children come unto Me," Jesus said "for of such is the kingdom of Heaven". Although our culture pays attention to what is big and strong, God cares about even the smallest among us. This is a word for each of us as individual members of Christ, and for the Church as His Body as we look for the things which are above.

Another of the 'things above' is suffering. God truly suffered in the Person of Jesus Christ; so suffering is important to Him. Patience or 'longsuffering' is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. In other words, He helps us to develop patience, even in situations where we must suffer unjustly. Jesus said likened suffering (whether physical or spiritual) to a cross. He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." St. Peter gradually came to understand the necessity of the cross and the value of suffering, and was inspired to write, "Rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ".

As disciples of Christ, how can we really follow Him without a cross? The thing is, as unwelcome as it is, suffering or hardship reminds us of the temporary nature of this world. Suffering underlines that we are just people – susceptible, vulnerable and weak. And so, as Christians, we should expect suffering and even to embrace it. Jesus said, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25) This also means that we will find the

things which are above wherever there is suffering – the hospital, the nursing home, and in the eyes of those who are challenged mentally or physically.

Last but not least, in order to discover the things which are above – the things which are important to God, the eternal things – we must develop a love for His Word. I recently went a funeral for the mother of a friend. It was not an Anglican funeral, nor was it like any funeral I have ever attended. But, I have to say that a genuine love and desire for God's Word was shared. Many, many passages of Holy Scripture were read, and there was no rush to get through them. If we are truly seeking the things which are above; if we want to follow Jesus with more than lip-service; if we really want to experience a change of heart and the new life of Christ, we must develop a love for His Holy Word.

Little people. All that is categorized as small and insignificant by society. The weak, the meek and the lowly. The Cross and holy suffering. The disabled. Those who have been tossed aside. The marginalized. These are precious to our Lord and they will show us the things above. But we will miss them if our hearts are not open to the Risen Lord and to His Word.

May He open our eyes and our hearts to His Way, and to the new life of His Spirit so that we may set our minds on the things above.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!