

Lent 4

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!”

March 22, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for today is from Colossians 3:17

**16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

We thank our heavenly Father that while we aren't able to be all together in God's house here at Immanuel, you, the church are gathering around His Word with your families! I thank God for all of you and your strong faith in Christ in these unchartered times. Only God can get you and me through this world crisis. God has given and continues to give His very best for you and me.

I'd like us to meditate on some very comforting words from Paul in Colossians chapter 3. We are so inundated with the world's news that we always need to be refocused and re-centered in what Christ has done for us and who He has made us!

I'll give you a second to get your Bibles open. Well of course, you can just pause this recording too. Ready? Great! Let's start at verse 1.

**If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.**

**2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.**

How many of you have become news fatigued? That you can't hardly bear to put on the news even though you know you need to stay informed. How many of you have become weary of checking the Hidalgo County or Cameron County website to see if there has been anyone who has been confirmed positive with the Covid-19? How many of you hear of other state governors calling for sheltering in place and no travel unless its absolutely essential and are confused and alarmed at the drastic measures being taken in California, New York in and my brother's home state of Illinois. Which state is next? Is it going to surge in Texas next?

My friends, as important as it is to stay informed as much as possible, we must not set our mind on things on the earth, that is, to fill yourself up with so much of the earth that your mind is not being uplifted with what gives sure, true and lasting hope...the things that are above, where none other than Christ is sitting at the right hand of God!!!! The Savior of love!

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God! That means He's in charge and using all His power for our good. Think about that, not just now but often this week. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God. He's got this! Don't be anxious or afraid.

That is what you just confessed with your family in the Apostles creed.

**He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Ah, the Creed comes right from scripture! ...Not just repetitious words but profound truths for you and me in this most troubling time.

"If then you were raised with Christ"...began Paul...this is the present reality that describes you and me. What does this heavenly truth mean that should be the on our minds constantly? What does it mean to be raised with Christ. Well, first there has to be a death. Your death, my death. Your spiritual death to sin. You are no longer a slave to sin. Verse 3 tells us.

**3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**

We have been raised from the deadness of our sin to newness of life...

Your life, my life, is united with Christ through your faith in Him and sealed in your baptism.

While the unbelieving world moves in panic and despair, your life has this amazing connection with Christ... filled with all His blessings of hope and peace. That is the reality of the Good News, with which we live! It's ours eternally, but that isn't available to be seen just yet. What we still see outwardly is our lives moving through the ugliness of this world. Yet, we know that this is not our eternal home. Don't worry, the best is still coming!

Our lives are hidden in Christ. What is hidden in Christ is a good thing!... not like the Coronavirus that hides its symptoms in its carriers and then pounces on unsuspecting people causing havoc and in some cases death.

Your life with Christ is real and guess what? When Christ appears... and He is coming... for we indeed are living in the era of the end times where we see all these kinds of afflictions...then, when Christ appears, then you will appear with Him in glory! Yes, glory! His glory and yours... amazing eternal glory leaving behind this temporary disaster filled world forever!

How is this possible? How can this be true for you and me? Well, let's jump back to Colossians chapter 1 and read what Christ did before He ascended to heaven...what He accomplished for the whole world. Ready??

Chapter 1 verses 19-22

**19 For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.**

**21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**

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...Made peace through the blood of His cross for all people, reconciling all things to Himself. To present you holy and blameless, above reproach in His sight. The sight that matters. You have no culpability for Christ took it all away through His death.

Yes, friends in Christ. These are heavenly truths to set your mind on. It is your salvation!

So, let's jump back to Colossians chapter 3. After Paul admonishes us to not live dead lives, old lives in verses 5-11, and you can pause this recording and read those among yourselves.

Then, Paul reminds us again of some amazing things to set our minds beginning in verse 12.

**12 Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved, ...***

Friends in Christ, even though much of the world as we know it has been put on temporary pause, God hasn't put you on pause. He continues to call you His elect! Though the world is upside down, your place in God's kingdom as His elect is solid, stable and firm in Christ. What a huge source of comfort!

Listen, how God describes you right now in this moment! **Holy and beloved!** We just heard Paul call us holy, blameless and above reproach in chapter 1.

Wow! Is that how you woke up thinking about yourself this morning?

In our locked down world, where frustration is giving way to flaring tempers, and people are dying by the hour in New York, by the minute in other parts of the world...how other worldly is it to be called holy and beloved by God!

Yes, you and I acknowledge that sin, our sin has resulted in disease, hate, and evil in this world. I'm not holy in thought, word, and deed, by what I've done

and by what I've left undone. So you confessed in your homes using today's bulletin, "We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment."

But then we hear the good news of the absolution:

"In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Elect, holy, beloved, the Lord who has begun this good work in you, has not put it on hold due to the coronavirus! No! He will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ! You can count on that!

So, what's next? Fill up the refrigerators, buy new freezers, stock the cabinets with paper goods and binge watch Netflix and Amazon prime?

Well, let's do some "binging" on what Paul says next to the elect, holy and beloved: Let's set our mind on some more heavenly things...

verse 12:

**"Elect of God, holy and beloved,"** (yes as the leaders of this world, as the light in this world's darkness) **put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

And that, my friends in Christ, should keep you more than busy even as you shelter with your loved ones! You'll need an extraordinary amount of kindness,

humility, weakness, long-suffering, bearing with one another, forgiveness and love!!!! It all starts with **“even as Christ forgave you”!**

This is all indeed possible and required of you, because of the peace that Jesus gives us, won for us by His death and resurrection, **which rules in our hearts.**

And how does that peace come to you and I? Paul tells us! Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, richly, richly, no skimping here, no rationing, no empty soul shelves here.

At a time where stock market riches, and 401k riches have fallen, and people's jobs have stopped so there is nothing but sick wage hours income or vacation income or unemployment wages...let God's word dwell richly in you!

Let Christ's word dwell in you, **shelter in you**, richly in all wisdom, teaching, admonishing, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. This is what you're doing even now at home. It starts at the home. Maybe you and your family haven't been as consistent with your rich sharing of God's word with one another.

But now's a good time to start new good habits. God has created rich opportunities in this down time, for reading His word, and singing hymns and spiritual songs to one another.

And thank you Immanuel choir for getting together on Friday to record these hymns on our website.

Quick disclaimer. No more than 10 met and we kept our social distancing as we sang to make sure no droplets were shared!

A special thanks we give to Bonny on the organ and her husband Joe, Ken and Debbie, Bob and Evelyn, Pastor Goetz and Karen who recorded the music.

**And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

All to the glory of God! And there are so many more of you friends in Christ that we thank God for because of your continued prayers, wisdom, guidance, encouragement. And we thank God, of course, for your continued offerings which is a joy and grace given to each of us , so that we can carry on God's work through this website and other innovative God directed ways to reach even more listeners with God's good news!!

We give a special thanks to God for our District President, Pastor Newman, local pastors, our safety coordinator, Gary Mitzel our church president, Don Vogel, and elders, and our secretary Obeth for her continued love for the Lord and steady service during this upheaval that all our churches have also been going through.

If this is your first time visiting our site, know that God's word is also especially given for you! And you can call us at our church office in the mornings from Monday - Friday and I'll be glad to have a personal prayer with you over the phone or in person. Of course that is always true for all of our members and Winter Texans at Zion.

So as we have some extra time that is not taken up with sports, and entertainment and social gatherings, take the time to be **richly, richly** to be filled up with God's word. President Trump mentioned last week that there was a great buying opportunity to fill up our oil reserves at these low prices. "Fill em up. Fill em up" he said.

Most importantly, fill up your souls with Christ's word, hymns, and Psalms. You'll need it to get through these days. Make it your goal to memorize a new Psalm. Start with Psalm 23 and make sure you know it word for word, verse by verse for it is so filled with rich comfort for you. And once you memorize it, you have it with you wherever you go.

You may have recognized the stain glass that the background for each of the recorded hymns. It's our beautiful windows here at Immanuel. We chose a different stain glass window for each hymn and we'll have more for the Wednesday Lenten service.

As I listened to the choir sing, I was struck at the beauty and detail of those windows. The message of Jesus' compassion and love for this fallen and hurting world reaches right out to you as you gaze upon the handcrafted artwork and labor of love by a past generation of God's elect, holy and beloved. What a treasure we have at Immanuel that we can share with the world!

God's people in each generation confessed the faith of the Apostles creed in good times and in tribulation. They confessed that Jesus died, rose, ascended and is seated at the right hand of God. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Dearly beloved, elect, holy, blameless in Christ, as the sadnesses and fears of this world spread with the spread of the Coronavirus, always set your mind on the things above, in Jesus, who made peace by the blood of His cross, and who now sits at the right hand of God watching over you, providing and protecting you! These are the good things not to keep at a distance from people but spread them especially now! Amen.

And the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.