

Easter 2024
Saint Patrick's
3/31/2024

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. *Amen.*

From the Epistle: **“If ye then be risen with Christ, 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. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”** (Colossians 3:1-4)

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

A few weejs ago, I mentioned C. S. Lewis’ famous trilemma.

The choices are either Jesus Christ must be either a lunatic, or a liar, or the LORD, he left us no other options.

As to whether he was a lunatic, I will admit there are a lot of patients down at Mission Hospital who will tell you quite sincerely they are God.

And to be fair, there was one time, when his friends heard of what Jesus was doing, **“they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.”** (Mark 3:4)

But, if you simply take the time to read his teaching, how could anyone help but conclude, Jesus not a lunatic, but rather he was surely the sanest man who ever lived.

Then, of course, there are many, particularly in the religious hierarchy, who tried to prove he was blasphemous; all his claims to divinity were just lies.

(My personal belief is they were not nearly so upset with the idea he was lying, as they were terrified of the possibility he was telling the truth.)

Whatever the case, if he truly was a blasphemer, it would mean he got exactly what he deserved, however awful his treatment was.

But we know the truth, because when the disciples went to the tomb on Easter Morning, he wasn't there.

The Resurrection is God's final verdict on Jesus, on everything he said and everything he did, and it is a resounding "not guilty!"

The Resurrection itself and Jesus' post-resurrection appearances thereafter gave the Apostles and other disciples unshakeable faith in his divinity.

Think, if you will, of Thomas' response when Jesus offered to let him put his fingers into the prints of the nails, **"Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."** John 20:28)

We know the strength of their faith because this same band of men who, save John, fled for their lives while their Lord was being murdered, after meeting the Risen Lord were prepared to give up their lives rather than deny the truth of the Resurrection, and all of them, once again save John, did, mostly horribly.

Be sure, the Resurrection was the core of the earliest church's teaching, the so called "kerygma."

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached: **"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."** (Acts 2:23-24)

And so, we come together today to celebrate our Lord's resurrection, and the assurance his rising again gives us of our redemption.

Of course, the story cannot end here, neither for Christ, nor for us.

He most assuredly has his work to do in Heaven, until his coming again, and we have our responsibilities here on earth.

There are some Christian groups which, implicitly or explicitly, tell their members and prospective members "having come to faith in Christ, made a public confession, and (perhaps) having been baptized, your salvation is secure."

Though we are free from the obligations of old Jewish the ceremonial law, it does not therefore follow that we may live however we please.

Having been bought at such a great price, we must seek to walk even more closely with our God.

Paul does not just leave it as such, he goes on to provide us with a practical program of how to walk more closely with God.

I always appreciate a program; I am sometime lost when I receive an exhortation to do something but am given no instructions about how to get it done.

He begins by exhorting us to set our hearts on heaven, and not on this world.

“If you then have risen with Christ.”

It is our privilege that we have risen with Christ; that is, we have benefitted by the resurrection of Christ, and by virtue of our continuing union and communion with him we are justified and are being sanctified and shall be glorified.

We remember the passage from Romans 6 we have spoken of so often,

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

To put it another way, and this may be a bit shocking, while the Resurrection we celebrate today is indeed Jesus’ Resurrection, it is also our own.

If we truly believe this, it is entirely reasonable to set our hearts on things above, after all, Heaven is now our true country; our time here is but a fleeting stop along the way home.

We must mind the concerns of the other world more than the concerns of this one.

We must make heaven our scope and aim, seeking the favor of God above, keeping up our communion with Him by faith, and hope, and holy love, and make it our constant business to act mindfully of our ultimate hope and goal.

This is reflected in our Thanksgiving after receiving communion:

“we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.”

The reason is because Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father.

He who is our best friend and our Lord has received the highest dignity and honor in heaven and has gone before us to secure to us heavenly happiness and to prepare a place for us, therefore we should diligently seek and secure what he has purchased at so vast an expense.

We must seek to live such a life as Christ lived here on earth and lives now in heaven, according to our capacities.

We must come to love things of heaven and to prepare ourselves for the enjoyment of them.

This is very much the reason we worship as we do.

Much as the ancient tabernacle and then the temple were an earthly images of heaven, so we seek to make our worship and our surroundings remind us of heaven itself.

Why do we have liturgy, why do we have beautiful objects, why do we seek beauty in our language and music?

A cursory reading of Revelation will convince us Heaven is a place of beauty and dignity, as the Psalmist exhorts us, **“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”** (Psalm 29:2)

When we get to heaven, we will be more able to enjoy it fully.

Things on earth are in opposition to the things above.

We must choose which goal to pursue and which to make of secondary importance.

“No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Luke 16:13)

Having said all this, we must always beware of “becoming so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly use whatsoever.”

While he was ever mindful of heaven, Jesus did not sit under the Bodhi Tree and contemplate his navel.

He was intensely involved in his work in this world, healing, preaching, teaching, loving, forgiving, and when necessary, correcting those with whom he came in contact.

He did not look upon the suffering and spiritual blindness of mankind as of no importance.

Everything he did in this world was to set forward the Kingdom of God and to open it to all who would come.

Most especially, he called and trained his Apostles, to continue his work in this world after his departure.

And, of course, he suffered himself to be crucified to overcome the power of sin which enslaves mankind and rose again to show us love is stronger than death.

But none of this did he do in any expectation of reward or appreciation in this life, indeed, he told his disciples, **“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”** (John 15:18)

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of how much Jesus valued things of this earth as compared to heavenly things is in the temptation in the wilderness,

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:8-10)

Or again,

“what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)

In closing, there is something we might consider.

Imagine you gave someone you love a wonderful present bought at great cost to yourself, but then instead of enjoying, cherishing, caring for, preserving, and sharing the gift, they were to lay it aside and play with the wrapping paper?

And now we ascribe, as is most justly due, unto Thee, O Lord, all might, majesty, power, and dominion, both now and forever. *Amen.*

“The Earth trembled and was still, when God arose to judgment, Alleluia.”
(Ps. 76)