**What drives us? Colossians 3:1-17. July 31 2022**

On my flight to Perth I sat next to a teenage girl who was silent until the last half hour of the flight. Then she said she had something on her mind that just would not go away and she asked me, *“If you could be immortal what would you like it to be like?”* Certainly a question I had never been asked before. However, it was on her mind and before I could formulate any real answer she began a highly animated monologue with me for the next 40 minutes. She spoke about an alternate universe in which characters bear numbers as their names, and one character is also immortal. She was absolutely passionate about this topic. I literally had no chance to respond to what she was saying. It was a highly unusual encounter but it got me thinking about those things that dominate our thinking and the fascination that exists regarding immortality . Then upon returning home I was reading the epistle which we have just read, a passage that begins with the affirmation that the recipients of this letter had been “raised with Christ”. We often speak about being called as followers of Jesus to expect to share in times of suffering, and that Christ is there with us sharing in our sufferings. We speak about being “crucified with Christ” and yet remaining alive. However, the concept of being raised with Christ seems to get less attention. For us in a Uniting Church context this may be exacerbated by the fact that baptisms in our church community usually involve infants and often just small amounts of water. In our baptismal service we hear that the meaning of baptism encompasses, that it is “the sign of new life in Christ Jesus. By water and the Holy Spirit we are brought into union with Christ in his death and resurrection.”[[1]](#footnote-1)However, if we worshipped in a church that regularly had adult baptisms by immersion we may encounter the concept we are thinking about somewhat more often. We would be more likely to hear some of the passages that are optional in our Baptismal Service, passages like Romans 6:4 “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The actual act of baptism by immersion mirrors the concepts being buried in the water and then raised to new life. The imagery is strong and powerful. Scholars suggest that this passage from Colossians may have been used by the early church as part of their baptismal liturgy.

**We are resurrection people**

So what does this passage in Colossians say to us today. It immediately reminds us that followers of Jesus are resurrection people, this is a unique aspect of our faith in God. The early Christian church came into being after Jesus resurrection. Jesus death left his followers confused and dejected, but after the resurrection it all began to make sense. The sacrificial nature of Jesus death for all humanity, became a living reality for his followers, after the resurrection. Their lives were transformed, they encountered God in Christ for themselves, they knew they had been forgiven, they entered into a newness in life, they had confidence that God was present with them all the time, they had a certain hope that even beyond this life, they would share in life with God. They were experiencing the transformative, resurrection power of God for themselves in their own relationship with God. The author, whom I am assuming is Paul, states that his readers have been “raised with Christ”. It is a theological statement of what has happened to them as followers of Christ. This is the position in which they stand. They do nothing to earn this position it is all based on what Christ has done for each one of us. Augustine Campbell described it in this way, “A believer is united to Christ at the moment of coming to faith; their union is established by the indwelling of the Spirit. The person united to Christ therefore enters into participation with Christ in his death, resurrection, ascension and glorification.”[[3]](#footnote-3)Through their union with Christ in his death and resurrection they have access to new life, life shared with Christ and under the rule of Christ. This life is a gift of God. This life defeats death, but it also empowers followers of Jesus to live the life they are called to by the enabling power of God.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is the life in which we also share. It is always “a work in progress”. Some will be further down the track in this transition to living a life of love and holiness. It is a truth to be realised over time. The goal is that our lives are to be so united with Christ, that Christ can be referred to as “our life”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Union with Christ encompasses mystery. It is a hidden reality only accessible by faith in Jesus. This life is driven by the reality that Christ embodies all that is of greatest value to Jesus’ followers.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**We are people of two kingdoms.**

The resurrection life in which the Colossian Christians share is expected to motivate them in the whole of their lives. This focus, is a living out of the request, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. These early followers of Jesus are being reminded that they now live in two kingdoms. They live in their own physical location in time and space, but they are also citizens of God’s kingdom, they have a higher loyalty than their loyalty to the local culture.

We can feel overwhelmed or despondent by what we see and hear in our communities and in the wider world. We often need inspiration and encouragement. This passage reminds us that there is far more going on in our world than that which we may see and hear. God is still at work. God’s kingdom has not ground to a halt. This passage encourages us to develop a vision that is heavenly minded, a vision that encompasses the “here and now” but that also transcends the “here and now”. Genuine heavenly mindedness does not encompass absent-mindedness regarding the normal affairs of life, and the needs of our societies and communities in all areas. Rather this heavenly-mindedness should give impetus to seek justice and to act with compassion and integrity [[7]](#footnote-7)

Tom Wright describes it like this, “If you were raised to life with the King, search for the things that are above, not for the things that belong to the present world of change and decay. In fact learning to think, rather than merely going with the flow of the world on the one hand, or blindly following what looks like stringent regulations on the other, is part of the key to it all.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Paul encourages these believers in Colossae to set their minds on this direction. He sees the mind as connected to the will and the heart, and the force of his original words here, implies that this will involve resolute concentration and a firm sense of purpose. Paul believes that how one thinks, shapes how one lives. He encourages them to set their hearts and their minds on “things above”, the things that God desires for this world.

We, like these early Christians, are encouraged through this passage to be open to God’s Spirit that we may develop a heavenly mindedness, which leads to a Spirit-drenched living marked by wisdom, humility, love and harmony. The opposite is marked by discord, violence and fractured relationships. As we pray for the coming of God’s kingdom here on earth, so we desire that our communities demonstrate the transformative work of God bringing life and love into action in our world.

So as we go into another week it may be good to consider, How much are our lives is characterised by a type of heavenly mindedness which transforms every part of life by seeing it in relationship to the lordship of the exalted Christ? Perhaps we should take some time with God that we may be inspired by recognising what God is doing in our world. Perhaps we should examine our approach to worshipping God so that it Is not just a routine exercise but an encounter with the risen Christ? [[9]](#footnote-9)

1. Uniting in Worship, Leaders Book, (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1988) 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Romans 6:4 NIV* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ,* 414 cited in McKnight 296 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Scot McKnight, *Letter to the Colossians, (*Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2018) 295 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Colossians 3:4 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Andrew T. .Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” In Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000) 639 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 640 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters, (*London: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 175-176 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 640 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)