

August 25, 2019
11th Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Put on the New Self

Colossians 3:1–11 (NIV84)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Many schools began on Friday. Teachers have a room full of new students. Students have new teachers. Students might be wearing their new shoes, new clothes, new backpack (filled with new notebooks and pencils and more). They will attend new classes and learn new things. For some students, this year might be an opportunity to start new after a rough year last year. It is a chance to make new friends. The beginning of the school year is filled with new things and new people and new places. New can be exciting.

But new also means that sometimes you leave the old behind. A new school means you won't see the same friends and teachers this year. A new class means you might have to study and not have as much free time. And it is not just students who experience change from old to new in life. New jobs, new homes, new members of a family, and so on can be exciting changes but it can be difficult to change and leave the old behind because sometimes the old was really good.

Paul leaves no doubt about the spiritual change that we have experienced. The old is really, really bad. The new is really, really good. But change is still not easy. How can we put on the new self, created to be like Christ? How can we put to death the old self with all of its evil? We must look to who God has made us to be, who we really are in Christ. Then and only then can we put to death our earthly nature and put on the new self.

Because You Were Raised With Christ

So what has God made us to be through Christ? Paul opens this section of his letter to the Christians in Colosse with these words:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your

life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This is who you are in Christ. This is the reality. You were raised with Christ. Earlier Paul tells us that we were buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through faith. In baptism, the Holy Spirit washed away the filth of our sins and created in us a new nature, the new self that was not in us before. For once we were completely controlled by our sinful, earthly nature. But now, through baptism, we have a new nature and our sins are forgiven through Jesus. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so too we were given spiritual life from the dead through the water and Word. We are, as the banner in the entry reminds us, a new creation. This is the reality seen by the Lord.

Of course, the sinful nature that was drowned in baptism learns to swim each day. Therefore when we see our sins, we run back to Christ. For our life is hidden with Christ. The reality is that God does not look upon our sins but sees only his perfect Son, Jesus Christ. For our life is hidden in Christ.

And there is one more reality to always keep in mind. There will be a day when our sinful nature no longer lives. The day Jesus returns or calls us home will be the end of our sinful nature. On that day, the new creation that we are in Christ is all that will remain. What a glorious day when we will appear with Christ in the glory of heaven, when we will no longer have to put on the new self. For there will be no old self to take off in heaven. Set your minds on things above, especially these three realities as you wait for that day: God made us a new creation, our life is hidden with Christ and we will appear with him in glory.

By Putting to Death the Earthly Nature

But we also live in the reality of this world, this sinful world. While our heads are in the clouds, so to speak, we still live on this earth. Paul knows that. The Lord knows it. So Paul gives Christians instructions on how to live as a new creation while we still have an old sinful self. He gives it to us straight:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips

Maybe you have a shirt that has a food stain on it or is getting a little ragged around the collar or has a small hole developing. Maybe you can't decide if you want to keep that shirt or get rid of it. What if that shirt fell into a hog confinement building, got trampled on, chewed on by the pigs, torn, and left in a pile of manure. Would you have trouble throwing that shirt away?

As a new creation in Christ, we see sin for what it really is. Sin is not just a little stain or hole or a thread coming loose. Sin destroys. Sin is filthy. Sin is disgusting. God has made us new and clean and sin should repulse us. Paul tells us to put it to death. The way Paul writes this through inspiration of the Spirit is that we are to continue putting the sin of our earthly nature to death. This is an every week battle, an every day battle, an every hour battle. We have to keep killing our sinful nature or we will get used to

the disgusting smell of sin as one might get used to the smell of standing in manure day after day.

But how easy it is for Christians to be deceived by our own sinful nature because the world around us agrees with our sinful nature. God clearly says that a man should leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Get married and remain faithful to your husband or wife for as long as you both shall live. This is God's wonderful plan for marriage. The world says live with whoever you want for as long as you want and then move on to someone else whenever you feel like it, throwing marriage away completely. Christians are affected by the temptation to sexual immorality too. Paul says to put this to death. Don't let the world or your heart influence you to deny God's will.

Maybe you don't have this battle against this temptation. Maybe greed is your big one. Always worried about not having enough or worried about losing what you have? Not content with what God provides? Upset that others have what you want? Then Paul tells you to put to death the sin of greed. But again, just saying today, "I'm done with greed. I'll be content" won't do it. Every day is a day to put to death your sinful nature that craves more and more. Repent and go back to your baptism to remember who you are. You are a child of God, raised to a new life of faith. You are a new creation and will live in glory with Jesus. What can this world give me that is more than what Jesus has already given. Put greed to death every day.

Paul lists some other common sins that tempt believers: *anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips*. Put these to death. Do not allow them to hang around in your life. Don't allow your sinful nature to live in the presence of a certain group of friends who are okay with filthy language or lust or anger. Put sin to death everywhere you find it in your life. You are a new creation. Sin is disgusting. Don't let it live on for any longer than it takes for you to realize it is there. You wouldn't leave a dog mess in the middle of the carpet for long. Repent and receive the forgiveness of Christ immediately when you see your sin. That is how to put sin to death continually.

By Being Renewed in the Knowledge and Image of Your Creator

Paul gives us one more example of a sin to put to death and then tells us about our new self that was put on us at our baptism.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Taking off the old self, putting what is earthly to death continually is just part of the picture of the Christian life. The other part that must go along with this battle is "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." If you want a healthy body, exercise is great. But someone who exercises and works out multiple times a day will not get stronger if their meals only consist of a 5 pound bag of sugar and a spoon. The body needs nutrition and exercise to get stronger.

In your spiritual battle against the old self, a Christian can battle with all their might day after day. But they will get tired and begin to lose that battle unless they receive good spiritual food of God's Word and

Sacrament. Just as putting sin to death is an ongoing action, so is being renewed in knowledge and in the image of our Creator. Be renewed for the battle by the reminder that Christ won the battle with sin on the cross. He sacrificed himself to win the battle for you. Be renewed by the reality that Christ won the battle over death for you by rising from the dead. Be renewed by what God calls you now. Through faith in Christ, you are a child of God and a saint. You are without blemish or stain. You are redeemed, reconciled and forgiven. You are a new creation through faith in Jesus.

A child might be eager for school because they get to use their new backpack or wear the new shoes. Christians, we are eager to put to death the sin in our lives and put on the new self because we have One who makes all things new. We have been given Christ.

Amen.