

## Life with the Risen Christ Colossians 3: 1-4

It is still dark when we walk with Mary to the garden. Her head is bowed for there is no joy in this journey. Her Lord, her friend, her teacher has been executed on trumped-up charges. His followers do not know what to do; many of them fear for their own lives. It is a journey made by a woman whose heart is weighed down. It is a journey to visit her dead.

In the space of a few days, this man had been arrested on false charges, had undergone a trial that was suspiciously "fixed," and had been summarily executed. Her hopes were entombed with his lifeless body.

Now it is Sunday. A new week is beginning for Mary, but there is no hope in it. I imagine her plodding, slowly and sadly, numbly, toward the tomb. She rounds a turn in the path and stops still. The stone! It has been moved - and not just a little, but lifted right out of its place. Mary's already broken heart now shatters into pieces. The body is gone.

A few decades after Mary's journey, Paul writes a letter to the Colossians in which he reflects on the events of those days in a more theological, philosophical way. As is often the case, we get a clearer picture of the long-term effects or the meaning of an event when we view it from a few years down the road. There has been time to reflect, to talk to others, to see what else would happen. There has been a lot of living in the in-between years.

It is as though, he says, we took a journey, also. We have journeyed with Christ both to his death and to his resurrection. In a way, through our faith, we have participated in those events. It sounds awfully theoretical, but Paul means it, I think, to be extremely experiential. We die and live, in a sense, with Christ, and Christ with us. How can this be?

I think the more we have lived, the more we have seen of both death and resurrection. Perhaps we take that journey with Christ many, many times. Not just in the death that will happen to each one of us someday, but in the deathly existence that is possible every day.

There are personal finances in a wreck, a financial hole so deep you feel you cannot get out of it.

There is the existence some of us have of dragging through each day, hating every minute. Boredom sucks the joy out of living.

There is the dead-tired exhaustion so many of us live with. How can a person ever get enough rest to feel renewed and refreshed?

Life is the kind of slow death that depression brings upon many who wonder how they will continue to get out of bed each morning. Hope seems a distant memory.

There is the very real loss of a loved one, taking the light out of one's own life. Will there ever be another happy day, or are all days meant to be lived missing this person?

You or a family member has been diagnosed with a serious illness, and you worry about the future of your health.

You have done something you regret terribly. You wish you could take it back, revert to the time before it happened and do it all over differently, but the damage has been done.

No, like Mary, we haven't experienced death ourselves, but we know something of deathly kinds of living. And, as with Mary, it sometimes appears as though hope itself has died.

Paul says our lives are hidden with Christ in God. And so we participate in his death. We therefore can die, in a sense, to all that deathly stuff that goes on within us. For Christ has borne all the sin, all the pain, all the grief and loss, all the loneliness, all the depression. Christ has borne it all.

But we can also participate in Christ's resurrection. What would that be like? It's not that Christ will necessarily fix what is wrong, help us win the lottery, take us back to the days when our marriage seemed happy or our loved ones were still alive - but the empty tomb does give us a lens through which we can see all these truly difficult things.

When we seek the things that are above, as Paul says, we no longer look at life only through the misery of a deathly kind of living - we view it in the bright light of resurrection. We learn to move beyond the deadness of our daily existence and have our lives renewed by faith. We learn to look to the teachings and works of Jesus and see what resurrection power looks like. It isn't just feeling better about things. It seems to come out of Jesus' very being. And Jesus was the one who spent himself doing for others while taking care of himself.

Seek the things that are above, not the things on the earth, says Paul. Look to the things that bring life; don't focus on the things that bring death.

Mary was moved by the voice of Jesus speaking her name. In that moment, she knew something extraordinary, something supernatural, had occurred. I suspect she remembered that moment for the rest of her life.

And I hope that in her dark hours it helped her to know that there is life revealed even in desperate times. Her life did not end on that resurrection day. She went on to live out the rest of her life with all the difficulties and problems all humans experience, including the facing of her own death. But the gift that she received just after dawn one morning in a garden was the knowledge that God has something else in mind. Her dead Lord, who didn't stay dead, enabled her to make it through.

We do not have the same memory Mary had. But we have other glimpses of life in the midst of death. And so we go on, living lives shaped by the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. It is our journey to try to live out the faithfulness that was shown in Jesus.

Hope is not gone, as we may have thought. Hope is alive. We have died, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. But now, just as Christ has been raised, so shall we be.

We trust a savior who knows what it is to die and knows what it is to live. What we can do is to choose to live our lives in ways that give life to others. Seek the things that are above, not the things on the earth.

Friends, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.