

A Hidden Life
Luke 12:13-21 & Colossians 3:1-11
August 4, 2019
First Presbyterian Church, Luling

Grocery shopping, I've decided, is the one thing that determines whether you live in a big city or a small town. Small town means you can't go to pick up a gallon of milk without seeing at least five people that you know. Big city means that you won't see anyone you know. You'll simply enter the store, walk to the back, get the milk, pay for it, and leave.

I grew up in the big city, and I remember going to the grocery store with my mom, and my theory holds true. We rarely saw anyone I knew, but every once in a while, we would run into a teacher from my elementary school. How bizarre it was to me. A teacher. In the grocery store. In my elementary school mind, teachers belonged at school. I have no idea how I thought they might get groceries or cook or eat. Teachers were supposed to be at school, not at the grocery store! It was a revelation to me that teachers might have another life, one that had nothing to do with **me** at all.

Now small town kids don't have this same revelation, because small town kids see their teachers, and Sunday School teachers, and doctors, in places around town, anytime they leave the house. But as far as I was concerned that day in the grocery store, my teacher had a hidden life, one that she hadn't told us about at all.

Of course, the truth was not that my teacher was living a double life, as if she were some sort of CIA agent masquerading as a third grade teacher. She was living a more full and complete life than I had been able to imagine, or that I had not even thought to imagine. My teacher had a life that was hidden from me, not maliciously at all, a life that was hidden from me that was more full and real than the slice of her life I had known up until that point.

I still get this feeling a little bit when I visit someone's home, especially someone that I've known for a while. If you were to invite me over to your house, I'm just going to warn you right now that I'm pretty nosy. I'm going to look at your family pictures that are on the mantel. I'm going to ask about the painting hanging

in your living room. If there are things on the fridge, held on by magnets, I'll peruse them as well. Because I thought I knew you, and I thought I knew you pretty well, and then I see your home, and I can tell by the things you have displayed what it is that you treasure. And I realize that I only have known a little bit of you, that you have a hidden life, or a more complete life, or a deeper life, than I have known before.

Or, this happens to me all the time, too: have you ever read the obituary of a person you thought you knew pretty well and thought, "Well I didn't know **that!** I wish I had known her better." "He had a whole life history that I didn't know a thing about."

I'm not sure that it is this concept exactly that Colossians is trying to describe but I think it's a little bit of it. Here's the first few verses of the Colossians reading again (check other versions): "So if (or since) you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory."

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. This is all rooted in our baptism. The early church was better at making this clear than we are, and our brothers and sisters that practice baptism by immersion rather than sprinkling are also a little clearer. One of the things we enact in baptism is that we die to the old, we die with Christ, as we descend into the water. And then we are raised with Christ, raised to new life, as we come up out of the water.

Our old lives are gone, and we have a new life, a new life that is possible because we are united in our baptisms with Christ, who lives the new life in its fullness. Our fullest lives, our most complete lives, our most real selves and souls and lives, are hidden in Christ.

Colossians intends this proclamation as a word of grace, and as a challenge. First, the word of grace. So many things seem to compete, most of them quite convincingly, for the ultimate position in our lives. So many things want to be our real lives, our most complete lives, and crowd out any other pieces. It's easy to get wrapped up in these things and forget where our real lives are hidden.

We're already enmeshed in a presidential campaign and will be for the next

15 months, a campaign where each party attempts to make us believe that the whole of reality is right there, in the words of the candidates and the worldview they depict and the signs and the speeches and the bickering. But here is the word of grace: our lives are not encompassed by a political party. Our lives are hidden in Christ.

If you or a loved one have ever struggled with an addiction, the drug or the alcohol or the gambling or whatever it is tries to make a new reality, and often succeeds. It becomes the most important thing, above all else you may have treasured before, and you will do whatever it takes to obtain it. Your life is centered around the addiction, and it seems more real than any other part of your life. But here is the word of grace: our lives are not imprisoned by an addiction. Our lives are hidden in Christ.

And it isn't just bad things that try to make us think they are most real. It's pretty easy to get wrapped up in our families and our responsibilities. It's pretty easy to get to where we lose sight of anything bigger than our homes, our daily to-do lists, or our hospital rooms. We just look at what is right in front of us and set aside anything that makes a bigger, or deeper, claim on us. But here is the word of grace: our lives are not taken over by the relentlessness of our every day. Our lives are hidden in Christ.

And, having assured us that our realest reality, our deepest selves, our truest lives, are hidden in Christ, Colossians gets to the challenge part: Put to death whatever is in you that is earthly. Instead, you are being clothed in a new self, being renewed according to the image of the Creator. Put to death whatever is in you that is earthly. And Colossians gives us some examples: sins between individual people and sins between individual people and society. There are plenty of times we choose to prioritize and favor those things in us that are earthly. Stop it, Colossians challenges us. **Your** life is hidden in Christ.

Jesus tells a parable in our Luke reading that tells us much the same thing. The farmer has had a couple of good years, good weather and abundant yields. So the farmer says to himself, "hm. What should I do? I know! Build some bigger barns to store all this so I can have it later on."

"You fool!" God says to him. "You're going to build all these big barns, when tonight your very life will be required of you. Now what's going to happen to all of

your stuff?”

Or, in the words of Colossians, this farmer has focused on earthly things, has focused selfishly on his own life, has limited his life to the old life rather than the new. His real life, the deeper and eternal life, is hidden with God in Christ, not stuffed into his barns.

Again, a word of grace and a word of challenge. What the farmer has done is nothing that can't be undone. He has to put to death the earthly focus of those gigantic barns. He has to live into his new life, a life in which he thanks God for all things, a life in which he realizes that those barns and their contents really belong to God and not to him, a life in which he asks how he could do good for his neighbors with those barns and their contents. His new and full and complete life is hidden with God in Christ, and it focuses on love of God and neighbor, rather than on providing only for himself.

Colossians, again, goes a similar direction. In our new life, as we are being renewed in the knowledge of our Creator, we will find that there are no longer divisions between different kinds of people. We will be one community, not focused on the well being of ourselves and our own groups, because we are all one in Christ, and Christ is all and in all. Our lives hidden in Christ will be alongside our neighbors, and our neighbors will be everyone.

Of course, that is not so easy to do. It is not so easy to be one with our neighbor, to think not first of ourselves and loved ones, to live in a bigger and deeper way. It must be nothing new, for we find Jesus warning us over and over about the temptation to amass things, lesser things, things that are not God. On the other hand, we hear from our culture over and over, that we must look out for ourselves, that other people are out to get us, that we can only trust ourselves, that the security of our future is our responsibility alone. And Jesus reminds us that kind of security is only an illusion. Our future, just as our present, is in God's hands.

Brothers and sisters, we need not despair. We need not fear. We need not worry. Our life is hidden in Christ. Our real selves, our true selves, our eternal selves, are not limited to what we can see and touch and put in barns. Our real and true and eternal selves are with God and in that assurance is our true peace and hope. Amen.