

1AUG10 Text: Col. 3:1-3 ***“If then 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.”***

A little over forty-one years ago, it was the biggest news on planet earth. Then last year for the fortieth anniversary, it was news again. But this summer, I bet it slipped by without you even noticing it. As important as it was—and still is, really—it’s easy to forget. **On July 24th, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Mike Collins returned safely to earth after man’s first moon landing four days earlier. These astronauts were the “toast” of the planet!** A world tour began with parades and speeches and endless television coverage tracing them each step of the way. For a brief time, the entire human race was on the same page, together looking beyond the wars and distrust and economic woes down here on earth and dreaming about something way up above. **But how quickly we come back to earth!**

As Christians and earthbound creatures living in this fallen world, we have things above to which we can always look—and not just the moon or stars. Unlike the world’s focus on the moon landing 41 years ago, our focus as Christians isn’t primarily on a place. **Our looking to things above is looking to a Person, our Savior Jesus Christ.** That means we can look to things above every day, not just for the then and there someday, but also for the **here and now**. When we forget that, when we forget looking to our Savior on a daily basis, we end up forfeiting so much of the joy God intends for us each and every day. So our text this morning from our epistle lesson brings us this **encouragement** and this **focus** for our Christian living:

KEEP SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE—WHERE CHRIST IS

There are so many things that distract us and keep us from seeking the things above. It was no different for the Colossian Christians in St. Paul’s day addressed in our epistle lesson today. False teachings were everywhere when the Church was new, distracting Christians from Christ. Some false teachings focused on Jewish **legalism** which claimed believers had to keep OT ceremonial laws in addition to believing in Jesus. Other Greek and Roman **philosophies of the day** had no place for Christ, His cross and resurrection. Paul helped the Colossian believers and helps us today put Christ in the appropriate place... **above all things.** St. Paul then sets our sights high, *really* high: **above all things, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, the Father.** Christ came to be seated at God’s

right hand **after** He had finished His saving work on behalf of the human race. God's Word tells us that when the time was exactly right, the eternal Son of God had left the glory of His Father's presence to live among us here on earth, taking on our human flesh and blood. He was baptized by John for the work of being the Messiah and began His ministry by walking the dusty roads of Galilee and Judea, teaching, preaching the good news of God's kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. **In all that He undertook for our redemption, Jesus perfectly kept the Law on our behalf from A to Z, from the largest things to the smallest.** And when the time came, He **willingly walked** the path that took Him to Calvary. There on the cross, Jesus died **our death** and faced the wrath of God over your sins and mine and those of the entire human race. And on the third day, Jesus demonstrated His victory over sin, death and the devil by His triumphant resurrection. Then, forty days later, He ascended back to the right hand of His Father. And the wonderful thing is this: because of all that Jesus has done for us, **His Father** is now **our Father!** Christ has **opened the way** for every man, woman and child to approach God the Father! Awesome! Unbelievable!

Where Christ has gone, **that is our destiny as well:** *to be with God in the peace and joy and bliss of heaven.* In our baptism, we **died** to this world and its sin and death and in our baptism we **have been raised with Christ** to eternal life...and that eternal life in Christ has begun even now while we still live in this fallen world. Baptism means that earthly things have been drowned and we rose from the waters of Holy Baptism as God's new creation: the **old** has gone, the **new** has come. That is the spiritual reality to which God has called us in Christ Jesus.

The challenge for our daily living is to KEEP SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE, where Christ is. It is a challenge because so many things press hard upon us and our lives. It's easy to forget things above when we are **unemployed** and we are angry and don't feel very heavenly-minded. It's tough to think about an eternal future when a pile of bills need to get paid in the here and now. It's easy to forget things above when you or a dear loved one is **sick** and while heaven is a wonderful place, perhaps we're not quite ready in our own mind to be there now. It is easy to forget things above when you are **young** and **strong** and life is **prospering** and the **family** is growing and the **career** is taking off—*spiritual blessings and security perhaps don't glitter with the same appeal as earthly blessings and security that seem to be within our reach.* It is hard for us to **see** these things. In the midst of such difficulty of seeing these things, St. Paul reminds us that now our life is "*hidden with Christ in God.*" The things of this world are not what the Christian life is all about. **Our life is Christ!** And even while we live

in this world, it is the things above, where Christ is, that count, that are always good and are always in rich supply. One day the glory of those things will be made known. We heard in epistle lesson: *“When Christ who is your life appears, they you will also appear with him in glory.”* (3:4) **One day we will all see just how mundane and trivial have been the things we’ve been stressing about down here**—how short the months of unemployment, how brief the years of pain, how fleeting all of our material successes. However life in this world has treated us or is treating us now, we can always SEEK THE THINGS ABOVE, looking forward to the **greatest One** above, **our Lord Jesus Christ**.

Some people who hear what was just said might say, *“That’s just another moon shot! All Christianity offers is some ‘pie-in-the-sky’ promises...what good is it for life down here?”* Even forty-one years ago, there were some people opposed to NASA’s space program, saying that it was irrelevant to life down here on earth. While St. Paul is certainly pointing us to things above, he also reminds us that SEEKING THINGS ABOVE has **everything** to do with the way we live now. The rest of our epistle lesson encourages us to do that very thing.

Living the life of things above is something we do in the here and now. It is sort of like an unborn baby in the womb of the mother. Such a baby is not “potential life” or “life to be”. The unborn baby is life in the fullest sense of the word, but the unborn child just can’t be seen yet. In a similar way, Christians are living the life above in Christ right now and do so ever since their Baptism. We just can’t fully see that life yet. And so, Christians are called to **make that life in Christ as visible as possible**, to be **different** from lives that are lived for things below.

St. Paul lists a host of sins that reflect what is earthly: **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander, filthy talk, lying.** Each one of these things gratifies some earthly desire: sex, greed, or our selfish ego. We are not above such sins, but we are called upon to turn away from them. **As Christians who have been “born-again” in the Word-drenched water of Holy Baptism, we have a wonderful reason to be different from the world in which we live and from living our lives in such sins: Christ isn’t found in these behaviors.** Christ is **above** all these behaviors. We are then to SEEK THE THINGS ABOVE where Christ is. **We are now in Him.** And God the Holy Spirit **is renewing us in His image** so that **our** lives become more like **His** life. Living the life of things above then means the very opposite of living the earthly, for-oneself desires.

Living the life of things above means living in harmony with others and serving others. **Earthly living means that we are thinking only about ourselves and all we can grab for ourselves.** Living the life of things above means that we are joined with brothers and sisters in Christ from all races, backgrounds, and social strata who are also seeking the One who is above, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I certainly cannot claim or pretend that I always set my mind on things above, any more than I consider every day what an amazing thing it was for us to put a man on the moon. But tell the truth: have you ever harbored the secret desire to go into space? Maybe to the moon? As Christians, we are destined to go farther! We have died with Christ and been raised with Christ in Holy Baptism and now, in Christ, we are seated at the right hand of the Father! **Now that is something to keep in mind as we KEEP SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS!** Amen.

SDG