

## **Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

### **Text: Colossians 3:1-4**

When you have lived with someone for many years you get to know their mannerisms – those signs on the outside of what is going on in the inside

It might be a shifting from foot to foot, a sign of excitement

An unconscious glancing at the watch, a sign of boredom

Apparently my big give away is when I am listening to my wife but actually thinking about something else

I have no idea what it looks like otherwise I would improve my technique: but she knows that while I may be present at the meal table saying “mmm” and able to tune in to just enough to keep track, my mind is actually set elsewhere

Apparently, I am not alone in this for St Paul in our reading from Colossians says: READ 3:1

Faith in the Christian sense isn't about quantity, its about direction, orientation, the dependability of who or what we have faith in, what we seek and where our minds are set

Faith as small as a mustard seed can achieve great things

Why?

Because it invites in, makes real in our life, in a situation the reality of what Paul calls here “the things that are above” or what Jesus called the Kingdom – the direction, the orientation is not on the problem, not on my attempts to solve it, but on God

“Thy Kingdom, come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

The context of all that Paul writes to the church in Colossae about is a response to teaching seeping into the church that said trust in Jesus alone is not enough: you need to still worship in a special way, pray in a special way, behave in a special way to please God

Paul is clear: remember back you your baptism, the sacrament of Christ's all-sufficiency!

How you stripped off the old clothes, sign of a desire to leave the old way of self behind

How you decided to head in a new direction, following Jesus, down into the deep water of the river or baptism pool, sign of dying with Christ

How you then came up out of the waters powerful reassurance that you have been raised through Him

And then how you headed out the other side, to new life, and as a sign of that was given new, white clothing

The “if” of v1 has a hint of irony – you have been raised with Christ

So, stop living life with your mind only half focused on the things of God – fix them there, not on the things of earth

Here in Western Europe, day by day we are immersed in a culture that was originally shaped by Judeo-Christian values

Over the years that culture has morphed, in response to an unfolding history and insights, to something now very different. Those changes in some cases don't make it easy as followers of Jesus to keep our minds focused on the Kingdom

But it's not culture that Paul is fundamentally talking about

It's about the basic orientation of a person's life

And note the way the word "life" is used here

In strong echoes of Jesus' words, "I am the Way, the truth and the Life", Paul describes Jesus beautifully as "Christ who is your life ..." (v4a)

What that means is clearer in the previous verse: you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God

The word "hidden" would have had some immediate meanings for the original readers, hints of the mystery religions for gentiles, rule keeping for Jews that aren't obvious for us

But the basic meaning is our awareness that we are, as one writer puts it, "wrapped around with Christ" – held safe, come what may

And the thing we are given, as we are held and wrapped around, is life, the life Jesus said He has come to bring, life in all its fulness through his cross and resurrection, through all that baptism represents

A quality of life that offers hope in the midst of trouble, meaning in the midst of confusion, joy even in the midst of tragedy

Why? Because we are trusting in the One whose Kingdom is coming on earth here and now as it is already fulfilled there and now in heaven

But we can only see and experience this here and now as we choose daily to "seek" and "set our minds" on these things, the things that are above, on the life that is wrapped around with Christ

People sometimes say: he lives for his work, she lives for that hobby, he devotes himself to that cause

The words we use can be an indication of where our mind is really set

Of course have responsibilities, at work, in the family. But we need to beware that those good things aren't becoming the best things in our lives, ahead of Jesus and His Kingdom

There is so much that seems so urgent, so really real, that crowds into the front of our minds, shouting and urging our attention

We can more easily identify such things and to some degree deal with them.

Maybe more difficult to be aware of are the things which are our underlying preoccupation, the desire or the anxiety, the thing you find yourself coming back to again and again in moments when, for example, your friend or your spouse is speaking to you but you are thinking about that thing – for on that too your mind is set

Or when you are day dreaming on the bus, or even as you pray

In this passage the very fact that Paul writes to "seek" and "set you mind" shows that this is a common spiritual temptation

The tragedy is that by setting our minds there we end up settling for the second best of anxiety, of preoccupation rather than the life in all its fulness Jesus has for us

Seeking and setting our minds on the things that are above is a daily discipline, a bit like a spiritual version of cleaning our teeth: as you head out of the door, as you say your prayers, say: Today I choose to set my mind on the things above. Lord Jesus, thank you that you remember me even when I may forget you. Nudge me to remember!

In some cases, seeking and setting our minds on the things that are above is minute by minute discipline as those anxious or tempting things crowd in on us in a particularly powerful

What does this seeking and setting our minds look like?

Well, I once saw a billboard outside a church that said ironically: why pray when you can worry?

So in the middle of the night as the worry crowds in, it's a decision to say "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven"

In the workplace when the talk turns to gossip and character assassination of the absent colleague, it's the arrow prayer "Christ my life give me life"

And as you are tired, and your spouse speaks about the important things that are on their mind and needs you to really listen but you find your mind drawn elsewhere, it's the prayer, "Lord may I give him or her life through my sincere attention as you give your life and attention to me ..."