

**Sermon    August 3, 2025    A Journey Home: Colossians 3:1-11**

Dear friends in Christ, today we gather around Colossians 3:1-11, a passage that speaks with warmth and clarity, pointing us to the heart of what Jesus has accomplished for us and what the Holy Spirit is gently working within us. This scripture is like a dear friend, offering encouragement, enlightenment, and comfort as we navigate the twists and turns of life. Let's walk through it verse by verse, weaving in real stories of faith to stir our hearts, trusting that Jesus has already secured our salvation through His cross and resurrection.

**Verses 1-2: Raised with Christ**

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

In the 19th century, Frederick Douglass, the former slave and abolitionist, faced unimaginable hardship. Yet, in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), he writes of finding hope through his Christian faith. Douglass knew that Christ's resurrection had raised him to new life, giving him courage to fight for freedom despite oppression. The Holy Spirit guided his heart toward "things above," where Jesus reigns in glory, helping him look beyond the chains of slavery to the eternal promise of Christ's kingdom. This truth anchored him, giving him strength to endure and advocate for justice.

This is our reality too. Jesus' resurrection isn't just a historical moment; it's our new beginning. Through His victory over death, we are raised with Him, alive in a way that transforms how we see the world. The Holy Spirit gently nudges our hearts toward Christ, who sits at God's right hand, ruling over all things. Whether we're wrestling with financial stress, personal loss, or uncertainty, these challenges don't have the final word—Jesus does. The Spirit helps us lift our gaze to Him, trusting that His finished work on the cross carries us through every trial, filling us with hope.

**Verses 3-4: Hidden in Christ**

*“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

Elisabeth Elliot’s life offers a powerful example. After her husband Jim was killed in 1956 while serving as a missionary in Ecuador, she chose to return to the Auca tribe responsible for his death. In her book *Through Gates of Splendor* (1957), she describes how her faith sustained her. Through baptism, her old self—her fear, her grief—was buried with Christ. She was hidden in Him, secure in God’s love, no matter the pain she faced. The Holy Spirit comforted her with the promise that when Christ returns, she would share in His glory, a hope that carried her through unimaginable loss.

We, too, are hidden in Christ. In baptism, our old selves—our doubts, regrets, and failures—died with Jesus on the cross. He has wrapped us in His righteousness, like a warm blanket on a cold night. The Holy Spirit reminds us that our true identity is safe in Christ, no matter what storms we face. When Jesus returns, we’ll stand with Him in glory, not because of anything we’ve done, but because He has claimed us as His own. The Spirit offers this comfort, assuring us that Jesus’ work on the cross is complete and sufficient.

### **Verses 5-7: Leaving the Old Behind**

*“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.”*

Rosaria Butterfield’s story resonates here. Once a professor and outspoken skeptic of Christianity, she lived a life driven by worldly ambitions. In her memoir *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (2012), she shares how Christ’s love transformed her. Her old ways—pride, self-reliance, and idolatry—were nailed to the cross with Jesus. The Holy Spirit worked in her heart, helping her turn from those patterns to embrace a new life in Christ. It was like clearing out a cluttered attic, making room for the light of grace to shine through.

We all have our own “old ways”—sins like greed, envy, or selfishness that once shaped us. But Jesus’ death on the cross paid for those sins in full, canceling

their power over us. The Holy Spirit acts as a gentle guide, helping us release these habits, revealing that Christ's love is more than enough. We're not chained to our past; Jesus has given us a new life, and the Spirit is shaping us to live in that freedom, trusting in the cross's victory. This is the transformative work of grace, moving us from darkness to light.

### **Verses 8-10: Renewed in Christ**

*"But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."*

Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India in the early 20th century, faced intense challenges rescuing children from temple prostitution. In her book *Gold Cord* (1932), she confesses to moments of frustration and sharp words in her early ministry. But Christ's forgiveness, secured on the cross, covered those sins. The Holy Spirit renewed her, teaching her to speak with grace and love, reflecting God's image as she poured her life into serving the vulnerable. Her transformation was a testament to the Spirit's patient work.

We've all struggled with words—perhaps a harsh comment, a moment of gossip, or a lie that slipped out. But Jesus has forgiven those sins, nailing them to the cross. The Holy Spirit is like a patient teacher, renewing us to reflect Christ's love in our speech and actions. This isn't about our striving but about Christ's completed work. The Spirit guides us to speak with kindness, to live as those made new in Jesus, growing in the knowledge of our Creator. Each step forward is a gift of grace, shaping us into His image.

### **Verse 11: United in Christ**

*"Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."*

In the 19th century, George Müller, a Prussian-born evangelist in England, built orphanages that cared for thousands of children, regardless of their social status. As detailed in *The Autobiography of George Müller* (1899), his faith in Christ united wealthy benefactors and impoverished orphans in a shared

mission of love. Jesus broke down every barrier, making all one in Him. The Holy Spirit worked through Müller's ministry, showing that Christ is "all, and in all," binding people together in His love, creating a community where grace prevailed.

In our churches, we see this same truth. People from all walks of life—young and old, rich and poor—sit together as one in Christ. Jesus has made us family, tearing down every wall of division. The Holy Spirit binds us, revealing that Christ is the center, dwelling in each of us. His cross unites us, and the Spirit helps us live as one, rooted in His love. This unity is a foretaste of the eternal fellowship we'll share when Christ returns, a promise that comforts and inspires us.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Colossians 3:1-11 is a beautiful reminder of Christ's incredible work for us. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has raised us to new life, hidden us in His love, forgiven our sins, and made us new. The Holy Spirit is gently guiding us, helping us trust in Christ's finished work and live as His people. Like Frederick Douglass finding hope in oppression, Elisabeth Elliot persevering through grief, Rosaria Butterfield embracing transformation, Amy Carmichael serving with love, and George Müller uniting a community, we are carried by Jesus' grace. Rest in this: Christ has done it all, and the Spirit is leading us home. This truth comforts, encourages, and guides us through every high and low, every joy and sorrow, every pleasure and pain, every twist and turn until we reach eternal glory in Jesus. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.**

Pastor Ron Breight   Christ Lutheran Church   Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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