

April 12, 2020. Easter Sunday  
Rev. Ross Varney

Colossians 3:1-4  
“Beyond our earthly bodies”

This is a very strange Easter. We had thought that we would be returning to some kind of normalcy, but unfortunately, we are still in “quarantine” mode. We are looking at a whole new way of doing things. We are perhaps at the height of the “curve” of sickness and death, still anxious, and coping as best we can. We would love to be able to gather and share a hug, but we cannot at this present time. So we meet via Zoom, some on computer, and some by telephone. We try to stay strong through it all, which reminds me of an old Christian hymn: “I’ve had tears and sorrow, I’ve felt alone, but ‘through it all’ I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, I’ve learned to trust in God.” This is perhaps the most important thing we can do at times like this: have a trust in “Somebody bigger than you and I” as another song says. Besides finding new ways to connect, let’s add the component of faith, in a Spirit that is greater than you and I... a Spirit that ultimately is a Mystery, yes, but also is the Holy Spirit made known to us in the face of Jesus Christ.

We have found new ways to lean on one another, on our friends and our families. But we also need to find ways to lean on God, on Christ, and on the Holy Spirit. The song we just sang, about Mary Magdalene “coming to the garden alone” shows that she had leaned on Jesus in his earthly presence. She had received healing from Jesus; she had “demons,” (perhaps psychological problems) that were healed by Jesus, so she went to his tomb looking for him. It shows that she had leaned on Jesus as a healer, and had put her trust in him. She was weeping, for she loved him dearly, and he loved her. The story shows us that Jesus directed her to his Spirit, that was beyond his physical presence, saying “ Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended.

He implies that she will find a new kind of comfort, not Jesus in the flesh, but Jesus as Holy Spirit, Living Spirit, Risen Christ. His spirit would become (and already was) what has become known as the Holy Spirit, a “Universal Christ,” as some theologians say. Jesus taught the disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring to memory the things he said and taught. He said this Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth, meaning that there is always more truth, more light to be gained as we read the Bible and commentaries on it. There are so many situations we find ourselves in, 2000 years after Jesus’ time, that may not be addressed by Jesus or by the Bible. Much guidance necessarily comes from outside of the Bible; We can consult our conscience, our intuition, and trusted teachers or counselors. So we need inner guidance, which is guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says that Jesus’ disciples and followers are “hidden in Christ” which means immersed in Christ’s spirit, in a way not always obvious to others. We are led by an inner Spirit. Paul never met Jesus in the flesh. So Paul is clear that we are guided by the spiritual presence of Jesus. We let that spirit dwell IN us as Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus.

When we were infants, it seemed that life was all about our own physical needs. We had to learn the tough lesson that mother sometimes needed to go away and do something else... that all our needs would not be met! We also know of experiments with rhesus monkeys, showing that without touch, there is a failure to thrive. We can conclude that there is a balance between embracing and times of not embracing (for everything there is a season). As toddlers, we learn that when we fall and scrape our knees, that we we need more than just a bandaid, more than just a physical remedy. We learn that comfort and LOVE are spiritual aids that help us heal. As children we learn the tough lesson that we are not the center of the universe. It is a spiritual lesson, learning that we need to make an effort to be aware of others and their needs. As teens and older children, we learn that life is not all about winning and losing. In sports, we learn spiritual

lessons, about how we play the game, how we treat others, and about teamwork. In high school and college, we learn that books and grades are not everything. We learn the tough lesson that we are known not just by our resume' and grades, but by the way we relate to others (and this become most obvious when interviewing for jobs!). We learn that everyone has a different learning style and pace. In Christ, we are "hidden" or enveloped in a spiritual world, where we love and respect all others. As young adults, we learn that life is not so much about the house that we buy or the car that we drive, but we learn the spiritual lesson that most important thing is: Can we make our house a "HOME?" Can our house be "hidden in or enveloped by Christ?" Can we make our house a place of love, a place of safety, a place of peace? We are always looking for the Spirit that lives in and beyond our physical bodies.

In middle age, we may have both children and aging parents to care for. Then we are really put to the test... so that we will not care for just their physical needs, but we will always be finding ways to show them that we love them and care for them. Can we show steadfast love for an aging parent? Will we look past the frustrating, even angry moments, to the deeper levels of spirit or soul, and respond with compassion? And then in our oldest years, it will become most obvious to ourselves and others... that we are surely NOT our bodies! "This limb doesn't work, that eye is cloudy and dim, those inner organs are not doing their jobs properly," and then we will say to ourselves, where am I in the journey of my SOUL? It becomes obvious that our spirit or soul is *beyond our bodies*. Can we still smile, still treat others with grace and forgiveness? Can our light still shine even as the body withers?

In summing up, the Christ Spirit can overcome so many obstacles of this physical world; it's a spirit of victory.... Not the kind of victory that puts down anyone else, or the kind of victory involved with winning and losing, No... but the kind of victory that is victorious

over suffering and oppression. The ultimate victory of the Spirit of Christ is one that includes everybody in a circle of love. We say Christ is risen, has risen, and will rise again, as the spirit of Love and Truth. With Mary Magdalene, can we “go to the garden alone?” Can we spend time in prayer and meditation? Can we hear the voice, or at least remember the teachings of Christ, the Good Shepherd? And like Mary Magdalene, we will also be called to go, through the “voice of woe” into a world of woe, to face challenges. Remember the old saying? ... that when we have challenges and trials, even a pandemic, “Will we become Bitter or will we become Better?”

So let’s use our time at home for some alone time, to get in touch with our “better angels,” in touch with Christ’s spirit, so that with Paul and Mary Magdalene, we too may become “hidden with Christ,” enveloped in Christ. These “shelter at home” times can actually be an opportunity (we may not have this chance again) .... an opportunity for quietness, reading, strengthening our bond with the inner Christ, and making time for prayer. Let’s pray for everyone we see on this “Zoom worship” meeting, not just now, but in the days to come. We are called to go forth, by a voice of woe, into a world of woe. Yet we can go forth “in Christ,” “hidden with Christ,” strong in Christ, and in spite of obstacles and setbacks, always rising with Christ!!! May it be so this Easter. Amen.