

COLOSSIANS 3:1-14
A CHRISTLIKE COMMUNITY

What shapes your life? What influences the way you live? What influences the choices you make? There are a whole lot of influences on us, some of them we recognise, others are more hidden perhaps.

- Our upbringing shapes us; our parents did it this way, or taught us and so we do same; or our parents said “X” so we now deliberately do “Y”, doing the very opposite and on principle. Our genes influence us and sometimes that is unconscious and hidden, other times it is more obvious; one side of my family tree is made up of lots of Lanarkshire coal miners and the other side came from Leith and Morningside; no wonder I’m confused at times! What influence do my genes have on me?
- Other people influence us: we do what everyone else does because that’s the way; teenagers at school do the things they do in the way that they do them because everyone else does it that way, and there is great pressure to conform and it is really hard to be different; it is easier to give in to peer pressure. Our friends do things this way; does their friendship depend on us doing the same things in the same way?
- Advertising puts the same kind of pressure on us as adults: everyone else has an Audi, so you must have one too (other motor cars are available); or the washing machine; or we visit a particular leisure complex or shopping centre. Glossy brochures or magazines have an impact: we take a holiday because it is well-advertised and looks really good; we buy a new driver for the golf bag because we have seen it advertised in a magazine.
- What about Christian faith? How much influence does our faith have on the way we live our lives? Does faith have any influence? Or is this the place where influences become difficult? Does having Christian faith influence any part of our lives – does that make us different from other people and so we play it down? We know that Jesus is Lord, but it is too hard to put that into practice because it will make us stand out from the crowd? We know that Jesus is Lord, but is that too much of a commitment to change our lives and live differently?

Jesus is Lord! From the very start of the church that has been the basic Christian confession of faith. Jesus is Lord: it seems simple enough, but for first century Christians it could get them into trouble: young men conscripted into the army had to say that “Caesar is Lord!” so the Christian was conflicted; I can’t say both and to say “Caesar is Lord” is to compromise my faith, but to say “Jesus is Lord!” is to get me thrown into prison for denying Caesar. What do I do? Jesus is Lord: it seems simple enough for the person being baptised, but that confession has consequences; if I say that Jesus is Lord, then my life has to back that up; I have to live as *if* Jesus is Lord. Every one of us, if we have taken any promises in church, of membership, or baptism, or ordination, we have said that we accept that Jesus is Lord – what does that mean for the way we live? How does that influence the way in which we live?

Paul is writing to the Colossian Christians about what it means to say that Jesus is Lord. What are the consequences of that confession? We have seen some of that already in the picture of changing clothes. When Jesus is Lord, there are certain attitudes and ways of behaving that are to be put off by the Christian, every day if necessary; we have already seen what these are and you can read the list again in verses 5-9, things to be put off, ways to be put to death! On the basis that a vacuum is not good, there are other attitudes and ways to be put on in their place and again you can read that list in verses 12-14. When Jesus is Lord, this is the influence He has on the way in which we behave!

Why? Always in Paul’s letters there is “why you do this!” before “what we do!” Colossians 3 is no exception, though we have turned it on its head this morning: verses 1-4 tell us why we are to live this way. “*Since, then...*” (*Colossians 3:1-4*) On my first trip to Cambodia, I met a young

man who was working in one of villages we visited, working with a Christian development group; he saw his job as “helping people to think better”; he wanted people to understand Jesus and believe; he saw that it all begins with the way we think! It is easy to go with the flow without thinking at all about what we do or the attitudes we hold; starting to think about these things is a good place to begin; then we think about Jesus is Lord and what that means and that is even better. Here is the gospel way of thinking; God has done some things for us and in us and that shapes our lives.

Certain things are true of Jesus; these things are also true of you! There are two basics: Jesus died; Jesus was raised. The heart of the gospel and the heart of Christian faith is here in the Easter story; Jesus died on the cross and on the third day Jesus was raised from dead to live forever. These are true of Jesus. What is true of Jesus is also true of us as Christians. Here’s how Paul puts it: “*You died...*” (*Colossians 3:3*) “*You have...*” (*Colossians 3:1*) Jesus went to cross *for us*; Jesus was raised *for us* and because He did these things, He is our Saviour. These events are part of Christian truth and Christian history: the cross is the symbol of Christian faith because Jesus died; the tomb where He was buried is empty, always has been empty, always will be empty. He died and He was raised, for us.

He also did something *in us* as we said last week and here Paul tells that same story in a slightly different way. He says to the Christians in Colossae, “*you died... you were raised...*” Now that’s different. Christians were still alive and hadn’t physically died and been raised; but this is a spiritual truth of life and faith. This is about the way we think: there are two views, the first of which says “I am master of my own destiny; I sit on the throne and control my own life”; the second says “Jesus is Lord!” They are totally different. The first is all about “me” and what I want and the way I think about myself and other people; I please myself and I’m self-centred and that can sometimes mean I’m selfish and cruel to other people; mainly we’re just unthinking about the ways we think, speak, and behave. The second is all about Jesus and that He is my life.

When Paul says “*You died...*” I died to the “me-centred” way of thinking; I died to “me in control of my life; I can do what I like, regardless!” When Paul says “*you were raised...*” a new way of thinking is born in our hearts, a way of thinking that says “Jesus is Lord!” We have become new people. Jesus has done this in us as part of our Christian faith. When we become Christians, Jesus does this in us; we become new people with Jesus at the centre of our lives. “*Your life...*” (*Colossians 3:3f*) What is true of Jesus is also true of us. The challenge for us is to believe this even if we don’t feel it; “Learning to *believe* what doesn’t at the moment *feel* true is an essential part of being a Christian.” (NT Wright) It may not feel true, but this is who we are; this is what Jesus has done in us. What is true of Jesus is also true of us: we have died and we are raised; there is a new kind of life in us, life with Jesus at its centre, with Jesus as Lord, with Jesus as the source of life, salvation, and blessing from God.

“*Set your hearts...*” (*Colossians 3:1*) “*Set your minds...*” (*Colossians 3:2*). Jesus is our life; He is the centre of who and what we are; so let the centre of our hearts and minds be Jesus. Jesus told a story about a farmer who kept having good crops and had no place to store them; it is a perfectly reasonable course of action is to build new, bigger barns. On the surface, nothing seems wrong with that. But then we see something of an attitude that creeps in: “*I’ll say...*” (*Luke 12:19*) Here is the way of thinking that is all about himself! Jesus describes this farmer as a fool; his life is ultimately empty “*this is...*” (*Luke 12:21*) I wonder what was in Jesus’ mind when He used the phrase “*rich towards God*”? What is our heart set on? Making ourselves rich and famous? Or living for Jesus? We can live for Jesus and still build bigger barns! Where is our heart set? On living for Jesus as Lord of our lives? This starts with the way we think, what is in our minds and hearts! Jesus is Lord – is that what we see? Jesus is Lord – is that a notion that influences the way we act, speak and behave?

What is true of Jesus is also true of us. Jesus died and was raised – that is good news for us, because it means we have a Saviour. We have died and been raised – that is good news in us because Jesus has done this to us. There is a new life in us and Jesus is Lord; He is our life, He is the centre of everything; our challenge is to live life in that way, with Jesus at the centre. Our challenge is to let “Jesus is Lord” influence the way we think, the way we speak, the way we behave – that is not a given, it is not automatic, but begins with the way we think. My way? Or Jesus’ way? What I want? Or what Jesus wants from me? What makes me rich and famous? Or to live for Jesus? What do you think?

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