

## LIE DOWN! YOU'RE DEAD

Preached by Douglas Norris in the First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto  
July 31, 1983  
Colossians 3:1-11

One thing you can count on! Paul does get practical. Much of his letters is theology - developing the content of our faith - but, sooner or later, and usually like a sledge hammar, Paul gets practical.

We have been studying our way through the letter to the Colossians which have been our lectionary suggested passages for these several Sundays, finding Colossians extremely relevant as we begin to work together in this church, as we become acquainted with one another and find clarity about our task. The Colossian Church was fraught with controversy, fights, schisms and "orneriness". Paul in this letter reminded them of the centrality of Jesus Christ, the purpose of God's work which is to redeem and reconcile, and the church as the instrument, the means by which God's message is proclaimed and people and society redeemed. The sermons have been important and somewhat esoteric. Today Paul gets practical, right down to the nitty gritty.

In his usual shot gun fashion - mincing no words - Paul lists destructive attitudes and acts that can kill a church, seriously cripple a family, destroy relationships, and incapacitate an individual's effectiveness in trying to live his/her life.

Listen to the list: sexual immorality, indecency, lust, passion, evil desire. The relationship between the sexes is something so precious, so fragile, that indiscriminate sex can destroy the relationship. Indiscriminate sex can destroy churches, families, and an individual's orientation and effectiveness. He continues with the list: greed. Greed is so destructive that Paul calls it idolatry. The Greek word literally means "the desire to have more." A ruthless self-seeking that is as easily satisfied as the attempt to fill a bowl with water that has a hole in it. The desire to get can get out of control, and when it does, it becomes an object of worship; therefore, idolatry. Greed can destroy church relationships, family relations, and incapacitate an individual.

The list continues: anger, passion and hatred, insults, obscene talk, lying. A relationship can hardly sustain lying, insults, hatred.

This list, and other destructive attitudes and actions, can be summarized as self-centeredness. A person who is self-centered, spoiled, interested only in their own dreams and ideas, completely convinced they are always right, can destroy relationships. The church has a difficult time with self-centered people trying to be the church. An individual so wrapped up in themselves is rarely happy and satisfied. S/He lacks friends. You can add to the list. You can add to the results of these destructive attitudes and acts.

Now, what do you do about it? What do you do in your own life when you know you need to change an attitude and just can't do it? What do we do in the church to minimize the destructive attitudes and maximize the positive?

Paul again is very vivid. Without mincing words, he cries, "Put to death what is earthly in you." Say to it, "Lie Down, you're Dead." He calls for radical surgery, like for cancer. He demands with a certain violence the complete elimination of everything in life which is against God. The Christian must kill self-centeredness. The will must be radically transformed. The center of one's life must be radically shifted from the self to Christ.

But, "Lie down, You're Dead," is not quite that simple, is it? It is like playing the game "cops and robbers". "I got you, you're dead." One of two things usually result. 1) There is large dispute between the victim and the perpetrator over whether, indeed, the victim was hit. Greed, lying, insulting, hateful feelings just don't die easily. They usually put up an argument. "Lie down, you're dead," results in, "No, you missed me. I'm not dead." 2) If the victim is indeed convinced that he was hit, he will lie down for a while, but not for long, because he really wants to be in on the game. He's dead for a while, but soon you have a miraculous resuscitation! And old greed or lust or anger might behave for a while. You make a firm resolution, "I'm going on a diet." I don't know about you, but that urge to eat everything in sight just won't lie down dead for very long, nor does greed or bad habits.

How do you keep your bad habits dead? How do you keep the destructive elements surgically removed without recurrence? How do we in the church live with one another as Christ wants us to live?

First, Paul emphatically states in 3:1, "You have been raised with Christ." 3:3, "You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." We have been resurrected. When you have responded to God's love, accepted his salvation, and committed your life to Jesus Christ, you died and were raised to a new life. In the church we are already living in heaven (Sometimes it doesn't seem like it, because we forget who we are)! The destructive has been killed - Put to death, Lie Down, you're dead. Therefore, there is no place in the church relationship for the destructive. Difficult to do as individuals, but that is why we need each other to encourage each other, and to expect the best of each other. Let us raise our expectations. Let us expect to live without destruction. We expect the Devil to be chained where Christ reigns.

Therefore, we live like resurrected beings: where giving is above getting, where serving is above ruling, where forgiving is above avenging, where we look at life, not as it appears to the world, but as it appears to God, where we look at people not as they appear to the world, but as they appear to God.

Let's pause for a parenthesis because the gospel seems so difficult for church folk to understand. Living the moral life of a Christian in relation to one another is not the means by which we seek salvation; it is the necessary consequence of the new relationship to God, living in the resurrected company, "raised with Christ." Trying to be nice to each other in the church is not what we are talking about. Trying to be good in order to go to heaven is not what we are talking about.

A couple weeks ago, I used the analogy of a child coming to Mother and saying, "Mommy, I did my chores. I've been good, now will you love me?" Love, a place in the family, cannot be earned. Some children are unfortunate to have a Mommy who doesn't love them. I've seen adults who are still trying to win their Mother's love, trying to be good enough. That is so tragic. Love is not bought or earned.

God loves you. You have a place because of God's grace. Good behavior, doing chores willingly is the result of being loved and accepting the responsibility of being a child in the family. Living as resurrected persons in a new relationship with God and with one another is the result of being accepted by God.

Secondly, Paul states that we have to get our heads straight, to believe we have been raised with Christ, and to live like it. He phrases it this way: 3:1 "Seek the things that are above." The King James version used the word "affection". "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." 3:2 "Set your minds on things that

are above, not on things that are on the earth," translates the Revised Standard Version. The Good News translation states, "Keep your minds fixed." What you think about, what you concentrate on, what is your goal is what you will become. If you concentrate on the bad habit, or the destructive attitude or action, likely as not you will not change. Fill your minds, your concentration with the things of God and you will become like the object of your affection.

Be concerned with the eternal truths of heaven, rather than with the trivia of this life. When you see things in the light of all eternity, what is a problem? A passing trivia? In our generation we are living with planned obsolescence. Why seek things when they are changing so rapidly. With eternity in mind, why get so involved with anger, hurt feelings, envy, greed, hate? What is worth all that?

Our Gospel lesson, Luke 12:13-21, illustrates this. The man was so captivated with the accumulation of things that he missed the meaning of life. Not that he shouldn't build barns, invest or grow, but life should not be centered on one's work. There are other things more crucial. To center on barns is to miss life. Set your heart, fix your heart on what is important and life falls into place, and the destructive elements die.

Paul tells us that the destructive is put to death when we realize we are living in a new relationship with God, and to live like it by keeping your heart and mind set on heaven. Thirdly, in 3:4, Paul states, "Christ is our life." To the Christian, Christ is our very life. We say about a woman, "Music is her life." Or about a youth, "Sports is his life." Or the workaholic, "He lives for his work." These persons seemingly are finding what life means in music, sports, work. But, for the Christian, Christ is our life. Jesus dominates our thoughts and fills your life with love, kindness, (next week's list). When you live in heaven, setting your minds on God's values, opening yourself to the Holy Spirit, Christ fills you and makes our relationship in the church, holy, loving. The impossible becomes possible.

You can do whatever you are called to do. We as a church can do whatever God is calling us to be and do. We do not need to be chained, imprisoned with destructive attitudes and actions. We do not need to be stifled by the negative. We are free. You are free. Rise above it all. Live on a different plane, a resurrected plane, with the power of resurrection at our disposal.

Do you believe that? Then, claim it. Claim the victory. Claim the new relationships. Claim the resurrection. Put to death whatever is earthly in you. Lie down, you're dead, tell it. And it can't touch you because you have died and raised into a new life with Jesus Christ who is your very life. Believe it, claim it, live it!

L I E D O W N !  
Y O U ' R E D E A D !

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

DOUGLAS NORRIS  
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

JULY 31, 1983