

Clothed with Compassion

Hidden with 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.” – Colossians 3:3-4

Last spring, my husband and I decided to take a risk and plant a grapevine. Now, this may not sound like a risk at all to you, depending on where you live. But for us – who make our home in the heart of the Canadian prairies – it is indeed an uncertain proposal. Winters here are harsh (-40F is not uncommon), windy (think whiteouts and windchill that freezes skin in under 60 seconds), and long (up to six months under snow cover). Only the heartiest of vegetation dares try to survive.

We took extra measures tending the vine in the fall, particularly its delicate new shoots and tendrils that had branched out during the summer. Once its last leaves had turned and fallen, we wound the fledgeling branches carefully in a circular fashion, tucking them close to the main vine for stability and protection. We then wrapped the entire plant in layers of burlap, to give it the best chance of withstanding the onslaught of weather to come. And we hoped for next spring.

I’ve been thinking about the grapevine while pondering our devotional passage above, *“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (v.3)*. One of Paul’s recurring points in Colossians, and in his other writings, is that we identify with Jesus through his death, resurrection, and life. When I accepted Christ, I understood, as much as one can, that He died to pay for my sin. But Paul is saying here that our coming to Christ is more than that. We also die with him. In Galatians 2:20, he puts it like this: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* The person we were before – our sinful self (Romans 6:2) and our attachment to the world (Galatians 6:14) are things that are to die through our union with Jesus, so that we are no longer under their control.

Then, as Jesus was raised, he raises us as well. To new life in faith – his life – and he holds us close to himself. The Vine, as Jesus calls himself – giving life and sustaining us, the branches (John 15:5). He sustains us through sometimes harsh and long seasons where what he is doing is hidden. I’m no viticulturalist, but I have read that during winter dormancy, the grapevine is not actually dormant at all. Rather, it is carrying out significant work – directing its energy to building its root system and absorbing nutrients deep in the soil. This for the good of the branches, for the growth and nourishment of shoots, leaves, and fruit in the coming season. In the same way, Christ is forming us – rooting, fortifying, deepening us in himself, so that our new life will look more and more like him. We are being transformed into his image, from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). I find tremendous comfort in this, that our deep pain is not meaningless. Our losses, failures, struggles – these are not necessarily an indication that we are far from God, in fact they could mean quite the opposite. And through our hardest times, he is producing in us an eternal glory beyond comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).

The second part of our passage also brings me great hope, like the anticipation of spring on the desolate Canadian prairie. *“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear*

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with him in glory,” Colossians 3:4. Two things strike me here. First, there is a great reveal coming. The life which Jesus is working, renewing, and transforming in us will come to fullness when he returns in glory. What we will be has not yet appeared, and we will be like him (1 John 3:1-2). Secondly, in the “in between” from our salvation to his appearing - where we live now - he is our source. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) and our example to live by. Through the rest of Colossians 3, Paul gives us instructions on how our minds and actions need to change, how being united to Christ in new life requires us to also clothe ourselves in something new. We’ll walk through these verses together, as our Compassion series continues.

As for my grapevine, I can tell you (with a smile) that the story isn’t finished. It did survive our bitter winter, its once-lifeless branches emerging from the burlap wrap dotted with fuzzy new buds. This season, those tiny branches and shoots grow thicker, longer, and stronger, looking more like the vine they are attached to; their leaves larger and more plentiful. And perhaps this year, we will even see some fruit.

- 1. What does it look like for my life to be hidden with Christ in God (v.3)? Do my actions reflect this? See also Romans 6:2, Galatians 6:14.**
- 2. Are there losses or pain in my life where I feel like Jesus is far away? Read Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Psalm 46:1. What truths can I hang onto from these verses?**
- 3. Does the hope of a future with Christ impact my priorities now? How?**
- 4. How would I explain Jesus as my source, my life, to someone who has never heard about him?**



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