

*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God,* writes the author of Colossians.

It is advice like this that fuels critics of Christianity to dismiss it as "pie in the sky" and misleads some sweet-minded saints into a starry-eyed acceptance of garbage on the ground, as if silence in the face of injustice were the faithful response.

We easily pass over and dismiss such lofty advice because it doesn't pay the bills or provide the groceries, and because we don't send our children to school to daydream.

But there is another reason we like to ignore it too, and that is the unwelcome truth with which Ecclesiastes slaps us upside the face.

All our work and toil and education and accumulation ultimately are vanity; groceries rot and so do we, and after we die, the bills keep coming but the stuff does not.

People who eat well and succeed and then die with the most toys are dead.

What's left behind becomes occasion for the children to fight with each other as they grasp after the very same vanities that didn't save their dead parents.

The market and our culture have a lot of money and effort invested in making sure this open secret doesn't get out, in commercials and security systems and cable news drama loud and shiny enough to keep our minds on things here.

Things above are intangible and nebulous and never go on sale, and they usually don't make good economic sense; without greed our economy would totally collapse.

We prefer a visible life and a hidden death to an obvious death and a hidden life.

We also prefer greed to generosity; even when we do give a lot away, it is too often under our exacting specifications so that we can keep clinging to our power, because we prefer to be in control, which of course is idolatry.

To set our minds on things above would be to abandon that dear illusion and to open our hands and our wellbeing to others, exposing us to God only knows what, and God does know, because this approach left God bleeding and broke on a cross.

Things above don't often play well in the market below.

The next verses of Colossians list some of these things: *compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love.*

They are lovely ideals and terrible business strategies, so we both admire and pity anyone who has too much of them.

Yet what is it about someone that we celebrate at their inevitable funeral?

Don't ask that question to the person in the crowd who addressed Jesus in today's gospel, because he wasn't paying attention at the funeral.

He was thinking about how to get his fair share of the inheritance away from his greedy brother.

The old man was greedy too, so he was a lot more useful dead than he was alive, as those whose minds are locked in on things on earth so often are.

Now his precious estate, which took up much more of his attention than his children ever did, is there for the children to claim, and to squabble over.

It was one responsibility of the rabbis to divide property and arbitrate inheritance disputes, so he spent the eulogy thinking about what rabbi will get him the most bang for Daddy's buck.

The hottest ticket on the rabbi market is Jesus, so he goes to him.  
Little does he realize where Jesus himself is going.

This episode, like so many that we will hear throughout this summer and autumn, is part of Jesus' ongoing journey to Jerusalem, so it takes place in the long shadow of the looming cross. The rabbi that the man approaches is living, soon to be dying evidence of the surprising twist of good news that God's mind is set on things one earth.

God's compassion and kindness and humility and love are so strong that God has come all the way to our home and now marches to an unthinkable death.

Along the way, God-reduced-to-humanity meets this fellow who wants his piece of the pie on the ground, whose request is the same prayer as that of our own greed stained hearts: "O Lord, make sure I get mine. Amen."

If God had the same attitude, we'd be cooked.

But Jesus knows better, is better, and he rejects the role of judge and claims instead the role of friend.

As much as this might frustrate us, as much as we approach Jesus for justice or judgment and think we want him to act as cosmic referee (ruling in our favor, of course), Jesus' decision to befriend rather than to judge is very good news and is our best hope.

Instead of issuing a verdict, he offers a story.

*The land of a rich man produced abundantly.*

The rest of the story is details.

The moral of the story may be that we should be rich toward God, but the story itself is that God is rich toward us.

*The land...produced abundantly*, which biblical scholar Bernard Brandon Scott argues is a miracle intended for the feeding of the whole community.

When the landowner plans to hoard it, the good news is that he dies before he can lock it away.

God is indeed rich toward us, but never toward just me, to the exclusion of others.

That is why God's richness is so accessible, so available...and so humble that we usually overlook it.

It comes in ordinary miracles, like productive land and abundant life.

It comes to us afresh today in holy baptism, with ordinary people joining our abundantly blessed but normal looking faith community as a little girl, typical and miraculous, is baptized with water from the very hand of God by way of the kitchen sink.

God's richness toward us comes in tap water and bread and wine and a community of people as predictable and as marvelous as sunrise.

And God holds nothing back; it is all spent, all shared, even God's very life.

That is the astonishing truth we trace on the forehead of Carys Domin this morning, the shape of the cross, the story of Christ.

Carys is joined with us to Christ, the abundant richness of God who has died, and whose life is now hidden with us.