

<sup>1</sup>Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup>But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup>Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

While on sabbatical I read my fair share of “women’s magazines” that touted the latest and greatest in weight loss. And yet, every one of them ended up saying the same thing that articles like that always say—eat less and exercise more. Do the writers of these magazines think we’re stupid? Who among us doesn’t already know that exercise and eating less leads to weight loss. This is not the latest and greatest in weight loss—this is the same ‘ol, same ‘ol in weight loss.

And this is kind of how we might feel about this passage from Colossians about “holy living”. This letter, sometimes attributed to the Apostle Paul is, with all due respect to its author, a whole bunch of “same ‘ol, same ‘ol”. I’m sure none of you had an “a-ha” moment as I read this passage. None of you walked in here today not knowing that sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, and idolatry are a bad idea. Indeed, you may have come through those doors this morning because you want to rid yourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language—not because you didn’t know they were unholy ways to behave in the first place.

And so what’s a holy-living-want-to-be supposed to do? We’re like someone who wants to lose weight who knows that eating a donut is a bad idea and yet eats a donut anyway. We are people who want to live holy lives and we know what’s right and wrong and yet sometimes we still do wrong. Our problem isn’t not knowing, our problem is not doing.

Indeed knowing is NOT enough. For some reason though, we think it is. We think that if we know something then we’ll do something. But it takes a lot more than that, doesn’t it? It takes the doing of it. And it’s not going to just happen—it’s going to take effort on our part. If we’re going to stop doing these things we know to be unhelpful, we have to start doing things we know to *be* helpful.

Because when it comes to holy living, it’s all about the doing. And in this case, it’s about doing the good things that will help us to stop doing bad things. Let me offer an example. I have a friend who decided that she was sick and tired of hearing the gossip that seems to be a reality of life in any small town. And, to make matters worse, she had found herself joining in on the gossip. Now, instead of just deciding to stop gossiping, which is easier said than done, she vowed to herself that when she felt the urge to join in the gossip, she would pray silently to herself instead. And, to help her further still, she would use a well-known mantra from the psalms—“Create in me a clean heart, O God.” My friend had the strength and power to pray for help from God to stop doing that thing that was too difficult of a thing to stop doing on her own. And, it’s working. She feels better about herself and with each passing day, it becomes easier and easier to refrain from the gossip. She is living a holier life—not for the sake of being self-righteous, but rather for the sake of being right with God and herself.

My friend has, in the words of today’s scripture, “set her mind on things above, not on earthly things”. But it hasn’t been easy. It would have been easy to join in the gossip, add a few juicy tidbits, and garner laughter from the other folks. But to do so would have been to set her mind on earthly things—earthly things like acceptance and popularity. But my friend was “putting to death” those parts of herself that kept her from living a holy life and instead, was, through prayer, giving birth to a more holy way of being herself in the world, she was, in the words of scripture, putting on her new self.

What does your new self look like? What do you look like when you remember that you are created in the image of God? What do you look like when you live in the knowledge that Christ lives in you?

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that—whatever your new self looks like—you can be that. With God’s help, you can “rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy

language from your lips.” With God’s help you can tell the truth, not just to others but also to yourself. With God’s help you can forego the bigger, better, shinier, and be content with the abundance of blessings you already have. With God’s help you can resist that next drink. With God’s help you can control your anger. With God’s help you can thrive in spite of your illness, your history, your reputation, your childhood, or your whatever-else-it-is that you need to let die in order for you to “put on your new self” and live. With God’s help, all things are possible.