

Colossians 3:1-11 On Things Above

Luke 12:13-21

Hosea 11:1-11

August 3, 2025

Bear with me this morning while I tie together different ideas from different texts, all under the theme, “set your minds *on things above*.”

One of the features of Christian architecture, ever since Christians have indulged in the practice of building buildings, is the steeple, or tower. This familiar sight provides an aesthetic, an artistic visual aide, giving a stateliness to the skyline of a town or a city, or a pastoral countryside.

Its purpose, however, is not aesthetic, but to give the people on the ground a compelling reason to look up, in the direction of the sky, representing heaven as the dwelling place of God. One might suppose that the view of the world as a ball spinning on its axis has diminished the power of the image. Up is down and down is up on the other side of the world, and a tower simply points into space.

I suspect that part of the the truth is simply that taller buildings have arisen that cover up the towers and steeples of the churches that at one time dominated the horizon.

We have, of course, a tower here, and are invested in keeping it maintained, not only because or its architectural beauty, it is, after all, only a building, but

because of where it points, which even for those in the modern age with its new orientation of things, still causes one to look up. We still get the point.

Set your minds on things above.

“Thinking up,” is a metaphor. It takes the down/up orientation of tall buildings and towers, associating, “up,” with higher things, the higher things of earthly life; nobility and beauty, integrity, love and goodness. and the like.

The gospel text serves as an invective against excessive attachments to worldly things. A man wants to settle the estate with his brother, take what is his and go his way. Jesus offers a warning, “watch out,” he says, “be on your guard against all kinds of greed. *A person’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

He then tells a story about a man who has too much, so he builds bigger barns to store his crops and other things, and then takes leisure as if a bigger barns will somehow manage to keep the useful life of his grain, or whatever the crop is, safe beyond the expiration date; as if he can take it with him into heaven. He calls the man a fool. He tells him that *his life is demanded of him in that very hour.*

One wonders, if this message, about the value of possessions and earthly life, is really in concert with the, “spirit of the age.” Is it really consistent with the American way? Consumerism. The Church, for the

most part has preached against materialism, which involves the idea that things can bring inner satisfaction, and the philosophical idea that the physical world is all there is; but has it successfully discovered and practiced an alternative?

The man who wanted his share of the inheritance was choosing possessions over a relationship with his brother. The gospel admonishes us that relationships are more valuable . . .

Set your minds on things above.

Which brings me to the Old Testament text for the day, which is from the Book of Hosea, and offers another perspective. We have not read it, but I will read it in a moment. It presents God's inner conflict about the divine human relationship. Hosea has married to a woman who was constantly unfaithful to him, and her unfaithfulness became a metaphor of Israel's infidelity. We may as well accept it as a metaphor of the church's unfaithfulness, a general human infidelity.

God stands at the door knocking, as we are told. Not just the failure to answer, but the lack of care about the relationship at all becomes a source of trouble, and it is presented in Hosea as a rift in the very being and character of God. As I read this high text from the great prophet, allow yourself to feel its pathos and its resolve.

“When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me . . .

3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.

4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.

To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.

5 “Will they not return to Egypt
and will not Assyria rule over them
because they refuse to repent?

6 A sword will flash in their cities;
it will devour their false prophets
and put an end to their plans.

7 My people are determined to turn from me.
Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.

8 *“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel . . .
My repentings are kindled within me;
all my compassion is aroused.*

9 *I will not carry out the fierceness of my anger,
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.
For I am God, and not a man—
the Holy One in the midst of thee. . . .*

This text offers the high theology of the church; God choosing mercy over judgment, and pointing us away

from the high things of earthy life to the things of heaven.

Set your minds on things above.

There is another text to share. The epistle texts have for a few weeks come from Colossians, as it did today, and yet next week's reading skips to Hebrews. It seems right to share the continued reading of Colossians 3. It gives a glimpse of life when the church as the people of God sets its mind on eternal things.

Then we will sing an old Scottish hymn from the 19th century, "O Love, That Will Not Let Me Go." It also takes us to the higher things of the Christian conviction and hope. I will share Colossians 3:12-17.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved; compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the

Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Set your minds . . . on things above.

O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O joy that seeks me through pain
I cannot close my heart to Thee
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be

O cross that lifted up my head
I dare not ask to fly from Thee
I lay in dust life's glory dead
And from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be

buildings - engineering feats
steeple - beyond into the skies, the things of heaven

Set your minds on things above.

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