

Red - Life - by Rev. Sophia Hayes-Jackson

CHANGED

Colossians 3:1-4 (MESSAGE)

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your[a] life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and life's ongoing challenges, I do not find it accidental that I am blessed with the opportunity to offer a queer hermeneutic or perspective on what I believe this Word may hold for us in a time where a virus is laying our species low all over the globe; I do not find it accidental that this choice of text utilizes Gilbert Baker's choice of "red"; red as the symbol of blood sacrifice that Moses told the Hebrews would cause the death angel to pass over their houses in Egypt; red as the symbol for life at a time when death is threatening each and every one of us. Red as the symbol that herald's the vibrancy of life in the Pride flag.

It is sad that in our current culture we have those who wrongly define this pandemic by attempting to religiously or spiritually equate it as God's attack against Christianity because of the gays, trans, and queers, or as signs and wonders, secret Bible codes, or new revelations of the God meant just for supremacists, billionaires, and false prophets.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul lays out a clear road map that speaks to what true Christianity looks like by exhorting us to keep a heavenly focus; but today in our midst there are religious leaders who are telling us that the only way we can currently heighten our emotional experience of God is to follow and believe what comes out of the mouths of the most deprived among us.

These religious leaders are the ones who, after reading this one verse, "put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire" will stop right there before they even get to the part about greed. They are the Franklin Graham's and Paula Whites who want to add the teachings of men to their Christianity, especially as it relates to sexuality and what God feels about it because they are plagued with asceticism and legalism much like the Colossians whom Paul was writing this letter to.

Something is wrong with a theology that seeks to weaponize Americans against the diversity of its citizens by proclaiming that God is a God who brings plagues, pandemics, and war against God's children because all of God's children don't march to the beat of the same drummer; Colossians 3:1-4 pulls back the curtain on realities that are hard to fathom for those who are breastfed on lies and ignorance and hatred.

In looking at what Paul is saying here in Colossians and understanding it through my specific lens of being an sgl, gender non, black person, I am able to embrace my transition in not only saying that I am Christian, but also in understanding that being a part of this world and living here is not about belonging here. I am reminded of the story of Pinocchio; the story of Pinocchio

after all of the wishing, fairy dust, betrayal, and lies is about transition, transformation, and learning to look above. Colossians, like Pinocchio is a story about the change that takes place in life once an individual accepts realities that are so astounding that they become pervasively different from people who have not seen and do not believe in the reality that God also blesses the marginalized and oppressed.

There are any number of directions a person can look when trying to figure out how to live his or her life. Some people look forward, focusing on their goals and plans and what lies ahead. Other people look backward, always analyzing their past decisions and choices. Some people look down on other people in hopes of feeling better about themselves. While other people look around to see what everyone else is doing.

What Paul tells us to do in Colossians 3:1–4 is to have a new kind of mindset or disposition; Paul mentions Christ four times in these 4 verses; no matter who we are or what we do, or who we do it with, Christ is central. What I'd like each person that hears this recording to walk away with is an understanding that whatever angst Paul or anyone else may have around sex and sexuality does not mean we must carry that same angst. What I'd like to happen for the LGBTQ folks who identify as Christian is an ability to create your own transformation of heart because you are the beauty and the glory of God.

What I'd like for my LGBTQ kindred to take away from this text is the understanding that we have every right to accept Christ as our Savior; and I believe that we have every right to embrace the idea that Paul is espousing here; when we accept ourselves, not only are we being raised with Christ from death to new life, we are being raised with Christ to the heavenly places.

Being transformed has helped me to realize that I am meant for so much more than this world can give me; that means that You are too. Colossians gives each of us a bigger picture to see ourselves in and a higher goal to live for. It directs us to rise above the things of this world and to focus on eternal things. You have been raised with Christ, and that changes everything.

If you are not familiar with the story of Pinocchio, find it and read it; for those of you who are old enough to remember the story, remember that Pinocchio becomes Stromboli's star attraction as a puppet that can sing and dance without strings. Before I accepted Christ I was a puppet whose strings were pulled for many years by Crack cocaine. I was just like Pinocchio who when he wanted to go home for the night, was locked in a birdcage by Stromboli.

While in that cage Jiminy Cricket who was given to be Pinocchio's conscience by the Blue Fairy that granted Geppetto's wish for Pinocchio to become human arrives to see Pinocchio but is unable to free him. We all have countless Jiminy's and Blue Fairy's who have appeared while we have been locked in cages and asked why we are where we are and who have urged us to tell the truth in order to get free, but instead like Pinocchio we start telling lies, which causes our noses and our hardships to grow longer and longer.

As I look back on many of my lived experiences, I realized that like Pinocchio I vowed to be good so that I could return to what I considered normal, to be free to live as I wanted to, not heeding the warning that my help would soon run out. Like Pinocchio, I got into trouble again and again and ended up on Pleasure Island.

Eventually like Pinocchio, I escaped the Stromboli that held me captive; like Pinocchio, I learned that in order to help myself and become who God wanted me to be, I had to help someone else. What I want you to see through this story is how it parallels our change when we get saved. This text makes room for me to understand myself as a black, lesbian, male-identified Christian; it allows me to see value in the process of learning a new way to live.

We don't have to be puppets to how the world responds to our desire to live freely and liberated and seeking God. When we shift our focus as Paul instructs us in this text. When we make looking to Christ our mandate, our conscious and our guidance, our responses to the world changes. When we die to the world in order to live, be real for Christ we show the world what it means to be changed.