

Lent 4—March 14, 2021

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Theme: "I'm Not Dead Yet! Oh Yes. You Were."

One of my favorite movies is "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." There is a very funny segment where they are moving through the streets of a village during the Black Plague with a cart for hauling away the dead. The crier is crying "bring out your dead" and ringing a bell, and someone comes out of their house and tries to load a body on the cart and the supposed dead body immediately says "I'm not dead yet!" to which the bearer says, "you will be soon." An argument between the bearer and the supposed dead one follows. My point is, that seems to be how we are with God sometimes. He tells us that we were dead, but I don't know if we really believe it.

In our epistle for today, God says through St. Paul that you were "dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." And I think we say back, "we're not dead yet!" I don't think we really believe how dead we were.

We know the words intellectually, and we believe the words because we know we're supposed to believe everything God says in the Bible, but we don't really fully internalize the words because they are talking about spiritual death and spiritual death is not very tangible for us. It is different when dealing with physical death. Physical death is very tangible. That is something we can see, something we have all been close to albeit have not experienced it ourselves yet.

One of my close friends had a heart attack and suddenly everything changed for him. He quit worrying about petty cares like who said what about him or who thought something unflattering about him. He booked a trip with his wife that was irresponsible from a fiscal perspective but he decided that spending time with someone he loved was more important than having a couple thousand extra in the bank.

I knew a woman who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and given six months to live. She immediately made a bucket list of things she wanted to accomplish before she died, but faced with imminent physical death, they were not the kinds of things one might expect. Number one on the list was show love and kindness to at least one person every day. Number two was to serve on the altar guild every month she was physically able. The rest of the

items were similar. She lived over 10 years and had to redo her list about 15 times. Going on exotic vacations and driving a new car were not important to her. She wanted to spend whatever time she had left loving people, forgiving people and serving people. My point is that thinking you are about to physically die really changes how you want to live your physical life.

I wonder if understanding that we were really spiritually dead and raised to new life might do likewise for how we view our spiritual life. As long as we believe we didn't really spiritually die and were never actually, completely spiritually dead, it is easy to live as though the things of this world are equally important as religious matters. We catch ourselves falling into the trap of separating sacred things from secular things and elevating the secular as though that is what really matters. We find ourselves saying things like,

"I should go to church but I'm just so tired."

"I should read the Bible, and I will, as soon as I finish that show I'm watching on Hulu."

"I know they need volunteers at church but I did my time and I'm retired now."

We know that religious things far outweigh worldly things. We know the sacred is far more important than the secular. We know it in our heads, but sometimes, because we choose to live in an imaginary world where we did not die from sin, we choose to elevate worldly things and worldly people and worldly activities over God. But we died to all that. We really did. When we were baptized, our old, sinful nature was drowned. St. Paul says,

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” We were dead and made alive. Like my friend who had the heart attack or the woman who was given 6 months to live, we too have been given the chance to really make our lives on this earth mean something. We have been given the phenomenal blessing of knowing that our only goal in this life is to serve others, love others and love God and we don’t have to be concerned about anything else. We were dead. And God brought us back to life to serve him for all eternity.

Sometimes people agonize over stupid worldly decisions. God has already done all the heavy lifting! You were dead and have been brought back to life! There is nothing to worry about anymore. Get your head around that! You were dead and now you are alive and serving God and one another is all that matters.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” There’s your guideline for life. You are his workmanship created to do the good works he has already prepared for you for you to do. He lays your works before you, works that you can pursue in complete peace and joy because he has gifted you for these very works. There is very little left about which to decide or worry. You were dead in sin. But you were drowned in the waters of baptism and raised to new life. Now you are alive for all eternity and while your physical body might quit on you eventually, that which is you will never die again.