

"Rooted in Christ"

Colossians 2:6-15

July 25, 2010

9th Sunday After Pentecost

Often, we have cut flowers adorning our altar area. They look very beautiful here, unless they are left on the altar too long. If you come back after a week or so, they are droopy and dying. Eventually, they become completely dried out, colorless, and lifeless. What once were colorful and vibrant emblems of beauty have become ugly and lifeless mulch for the garden.

Of course, the flowers were dead long before the time they shriveled up. The source of life in flowers is not the blooms which we notice, but the roots which we cannot see. Through the roots and the nourishment carried by the roots, life survives and thrives. However, cut off the roots and the life-giving and life-sustaining nourishment, and the flowers are already dead, even before they begin to decay for, apart from life, there is only death.

This is a metaphor for our human condition. When we come into this world, we are like those cut flowers. Just as we think flowers are alive because they have beautiful blooms, we think we are truly alive because we have a heart beat and exhibit brain waves. We think we are alive because we look good. We can do good things – be kind to our neighbor, work hard, love our family, and be good citizens.

But, in fact, we are dead. We have the appearance of life-like cut flowers, but we are dead because we are cut off. We have no roots. We have no source of sustenance. Paul describes us in our text today: “you..were dead in your trespasses”. Not only do we not have a source of spiritual life and nourishment, we are submerged in the toxicity of trespasses and transgressions. We have inherited the state of death from our first father, Adam, and we have compounded the problem (if that’s possible) with the toxic waste of sin. We started off dead and have insured, by our sinful rebellion against God’s way, that there is no possible way for there to be life.

Like the cut flowers which look good, but are dead on the inside and eventually crumble into the dust, the death that is in the inside of us now will manifest itself on the outside. That which has killed our soul will eventually kill our bodies. We can slow it down through healthy life styles. We can delay it through medical treatments. But, without roots, we cannot prevent it. Without a source of life-giving nurture, we cannot stop it. The spiritually dead will become the physically dead who will end up as the eternally dead in hell.

But that which we cannot do, God has done. He has come into our toxic-laced existence of death. First, He removes the sin which prevents us from having true life. Paul likens our sin to a record of debts that stood against us with its legal demands. In other words, as creatures of God, we owe obedience to God. Every time we fail to obey the Law of God, our debt to God increases. Every time we actively act against the Law of God, our debt to God increases. If one sinful act is able to prevent life, then imagine your debt to God in thought, word, and deed.

God takes that record of debt and sets it aside. He doesn't ignore it or say that it is ok. Rather, Paul says, God nailed your record of debt to the cross. He nailed my record of debt to the cross. He nailed the records of debt of all people who have lived, who lived now, or ever will live to the cross. He nailed sin to the cross in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, had no sin but was made by God to be sin for us. By doing that, Jesus was able to overcome Satan and take away his power. He put him and his minions to utter shame. As Paul writes, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

In doing that, God was able to forgive our sins and not hold them against us. Our slate has been cleared. Death has lost its power to cause us fear or control us because sin, the cause of death, has been forgiven. But there is not yet life. Just as Jesus first died and then rose again from the dead to life again, so also sin is first forgiven through His death and life is given through His resurrection from the dead to life.

This new life – this spiritual resurrection and regeneration – came to you in your baptism. Paul says, “Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised [Jesus] from the dead. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God has made alive together with him.”

You have been made alive again! You have come from death to life. This is not the mere appearance of life (as is the case with cut flowers), this is life itself – true life. Jesus once said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) In your baptism, you have life to the full.

This is not a temporary resuscitation or momentary life. This is a lasting life. Why? Because you have been given roots. Paul writes, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Christ has given you life and now you are connected to Him as the source of life. Like flowers in our beautiful flower beds continue to live and flourish because they have roots in the ground, so, too, you continue to live and flourish because you have roots in Christ.

He not only brings you to life. He builds you up in him by providing sustenance for that life in His Holy Word which establishes you in the faith and by His Holy Supper in which He unites Himself – His body and blood – to you in the eating and drinking and thus brings to you everything that He is – His holiness, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This gives us a whole new perspective then on how we should live. Paul writes to the Colossians, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” Do not be fooled, either by those who say that life is the physical affairs of this world or those, on the other hand, who say life is some sort of vague spiritual thing that only truly happens after death. The first is an empty deceit. The second is mere philosophy.

Life is Christ and Christ is life. We gather here in this place, not to fulfill religious duties or obligations. Rules and laws are what got us in trouble in the first place. They cannot be the solution. Rather, we gather here to be close to our roots – the source of life – Jesus Christ. We come here to have our lives cleaned up by the unending supply of forgiveness which He gained for us on the cross. We come here to have our lives renewed and reinvigorated by His Word, read and preached to us and the promises therein which He guaranteed to us by coming out of the tomb alive on the third day. We come here to be fed and have our lives strengthened by His very body and blood, given and shed for us on the cross and delivered to our mouths in bread and wine.

We go out into the world, not to convert people, not to bolster our church by gaining new members and not to save our church by regaining inactive members. We go out to offer life to dead people. We “hold out the word of life” as Paul says in Philippians, that others may have life, too. Such a proposition, whether it be done by going door to door, speaking to a friend, or witnessing at a state fair booth, is neither intellectually demanding nor frightfully complicated. Martin Luther said it best when he said, “We are mere beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.”

As the summer continues, keep an eye on flowers left on the altar or on your table at home and compare them with the flowers in our flower beds. Both kinds look good, but only one kind has life – the ones which are rooted and nourished. They are the ones that will last. When you evaluate the status of people, even yourself, don’t do it on the basis of looks. Some may look good with all of the wealth, power, and success they possess. But the only ones who will last are the ones rooted in Christ Jesus. You have been rooted in Him by baptism, established in the faith by His Word, fed and nourished by His body and blood in Holy Communion. Continue in these things and you will last – forever. Amen.