

## "From Death To Life" Ephesians 2:1-10

March 18,2012

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday In Lent

A major theme in many horror movies has always been bringing the dead back to life. This theme is seen in movies like Frankenstein, Night of the Living Dead, and zombie movies which are very popular now. There are certain details in these movies that seem to be the same in all the movies.

First of all, the dead in these movies always seem to be ugly repulsive corpses. Whether it's Frankenstein's monster or zombies, there is nothing pretty about the situation. I guess that's what makes them horror movies. There would be nothing scary about bringing pretty cheerleaders back to life.

Secondly, the idea of coming back to life never originates with the corpse. Nor does the corpse ever have any part in bringing themselves back to life. The idea is always from someone else (usually a mad scientist) and it always involves some outside means. In Frankenstein, the creature is lifted up by Dr. Frankenstein on a table, up through the roof, into a thunderstorm so that the power of lightening would give life. I saw a movie where a fluorescent green serum was injected into the spinal cord of a corpse to resuscitate it. Zombie movies usually involve some sort of radiation or infection that turns people into zombies.

Third, I've noticed that these brilliant ideas to bring life out of death, when administered by fallible human beings, never really work out. When man tries to create life, it fails. What results is some grotesque caricature of life, not life as God intended it. In one television show, zombies are called "walkers" because, although they move about by instinct, they have no identity or soul. This pseudo-life always results in permanent death.

What does this have to do with us and our spiritual lives? Most of us would think "absolutely nothing." We would like to think that we have nothing in common with corpses. We think that we enter this world, not only alive physically, but alive spiritually as well – as basically good people. At

worst, we are neutral and, by the power of our will, are able to choose to be spiritually alive.

Therefore, we may take pride in the choice that we made or, perhaps, we don't even think about our spiritual life or we take it for granted.

Our text from Ephesians, Paul gives us a very different picture of who we are. He says, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." Our natural condition is not to be spiritually sick, weakened, or impaired. We are spiritually dead. There are a couple of words for "dead" which Paul could have used. The one he chose means "corpse". In our natural state, we are spiritually ugly and repulsive corpses because of the sinful condition into which we have been born and the individual sins we have walked in.

Paul says we have followed "the course of this world", rather than the course of God. We have blended in with the morality and mindset of this world in the evil actions which we do and the right actions which we shy away from instead of living by God's Law. We have followed "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" which is the devil. We have "lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind." We have done what we want to do, not what God wants us to do. We have lived to gain pleasure for ourselves, rather than devoting ourselves to the service of God.

Despite our high opinion of ourselves, especially when we compare ourselves with "people in the world", Paul cuts us down to size. He says that we "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." We are no better than those we refer to as "worldly people" because, by nature and often by practice, we are worldly people, too. We are rotting corpses deserving only God's eternal wrath and anger.

We are in great danger. Yet, as corpses, we were oblivious to that danger. We had no desire to be spiritually alive. And, even if we had the desire to become alive, we had no ability to come to life. Dead people don't decide to come back to life, nor can they. What we think is life is, in reality, some zombie-like existence. We move about as if we were alive, but inside we are lifeless and dead. What people call "life" today is only a grotesque caricature of life as God intends.

What can we do about this? Nothing. But thank God that He can do something and that He has. The fact that He has is truly remarkable. If you ever saw or came into contact with a dead body, it would be a traumatic experience. It is not something you would desire. You would be repulsed by it. You would want to get rid of such a horrible thing as fast as you can.

But God is different. Paul says God is rich in mercy. He has compassion on us and all people in our dead condition. He has loved us with a great love, even when we were dead in our trespasses. He wasn't repulsed. He didn't want to get rid of us as fast as He could. He wanted to give us life, life as He intended it to be.

So He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. As we remember, especially during this Lenten season, Jesus took upon Himself the foul stench of our sin. He was nailed to the cross with that sin and died. John, in the beginning of his Gospel, said, "In him was life." Jesus, the source of life, became a corpse for us and was laid in a tomb. But that's not the end of the story as it would be for every other person who has ever died. Three short days later, God made Jesus alive again from the dead and gave Him life.

We may say, "That's all well and good for Jesus, but what about us?" The Bible says that, when we were baptized, we were baptized into Christ. We are united with Him. We share in all that He is, has, and has done. Our sin, in its entirety – thought, word, and deed – was nailed to the cross with Christ. We were buried with Christ and our sin was buried there, as well. Our text today says that God "made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Our conversion to Christ was not a choice or decision on our part. Neither was it merely the acceptance of some doctrinal or moral teachings. It was a resurrection experience. God, acting on His own, made us who were dead and powerless to be alive and vibrant in Christ Jesus.

We have been saved from the stench of sin, the corruption of death, and the power of the prince of this world, Satan. All of this is by God's grace – His undeserved love for us. This is so

important that Paul writes it twice for emphasis. We had nothing to do with it. God has done it all.

He made dead people alive again.

You have been made alive and are alive now. That is a life to be lived out now. It starts right here in church where that life is conceived. When people talk about why they don't go to church or want to debate acceptable reasons for being absent from church, I don't get angry. I just get sad. Church is not some sort of unpleasant obligation like a dental appointment: something that hurts, but is necessary. Here is where real life is given out in Holy Baptism where we are connected to Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection.

Here is also where real life is nourished by His Word of life. Here is where life is fed with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. And we often seem oblivious to that or we take it for granted. On Thursday, I visited with Esther Largent who is dying at Peace Hospice. When I asked her if there was anything she needed, she didn't say, "I want a blanket" or "I need a pain pill" or "Give me something to eat." She said, "Can you give me the Lord's Supper." Even I, who should have been prepared, wasn't. I had to go out in the car to get my communion set so I could give to her what one church father once called "the medicine of immortality." She knew, in the midst of physical dying, where true life was to be had. In dying, she lives and ever will live. May we know the same and treasure this gift as Esther does.

We take that life out of the sanctuary rather than just sit on it. The life of Christ to which we are united is a life to be lived, not just sat on while we wait to go to heaven. Paul reminds us that we, who have been saved by the gift of grace, through the gift of faith, are God's new creation. We have been created, in our unity with Christ Jesus, for good works. We don't have to scurry around, looking for good works (i.e. acts of obedience to God's will which serve our neighbor) to do. God Himself has prepared good works for each of us baptized Christians to do. We are to walk in them - that is, to immerse ourselves in them. They are not part of our life. They are our life. The One who has created us new and who has prepared the good works for us to do will, by the power of His Spirit, empower us to do them.

We have been given a very precious gift: life. It is not something which we have by nature. It is not something we could bring about by ourselves. It is not something we deserve. Life is a gift, given by God by grace, which we are to enjoy with gratitude to God and use to His glory. The life given by God is something that lasts forever. I once saw a funeral banner in a church that has stuck with me for a long time. It sums up the meaning of life in these words: *We are born to die. In baptism, we die to live. And in death, we are born into eternal life. Amen.*