

Colossians 2:13-15 + God Made You Alive with Christ¹

Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 2nd Sunday after Pentecost + 3 June 2018

While on our recent trip, I came across a quote in a book I was reading that made me stop and think for a moment. **“In order to be raised from the dead, one must actually first be dead.”**² Seems rather obvious, doesn't it? If you're going to be raised from the dead, you actually first have to be dead, but what does it mean to be dead? Of course, the first thought that comes to mind is physical death—a flat line on a hospital monitor, a lifeless body in a casket, but death is more than just the ugliness of physical death.

Take our first parents, Adam and Eve, for example. When God told them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he said to them, **“When you eat of it you will surely die...”** (Genesis 2:17) Yet what happened when they ate that forbidden fruit? Moses tells us that **“the eyes of both of them were opened,”** but neither of them dropped dead. (Genesis 3:7) In fact, Adam didn't die for another 900 years! So was the Lord lying? Was God saying, “I really didn't mean it”? Or did Adam and Eve actually die when they first disobeyed God?

For that answer, you simply need to consider what followed. Adam and Eve died to God the moment they yearned to be like God. They died spiritually. They died inwardly. That inward death led to the actual sin of reaching out and taking the forbidden fruit. That spiritual death spiraled out of control with shame at their nakedness, fear at the presence of the holy God, and as blame against each other flowed from their sin-filled lips. They didn't die physically that day, but rather they died spiritually. Surely physical and everlasting death in hell would follow...if not for the promise of another death centuries later.

You see, in the death of another, in the death of Jesus, we find the answer not only to Adam and Eve's death, but also to our own. This morning the Apostle Paul takes us to the cross of Christ where we see how **GOD MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST.**

“In order to be raised from the dead, one must actually first be dead.” Before we can understand how we have been raised to life with Christ, we need to understand our original condition. Paul puts it right out there: **“When you were dead in trespasses,” “when you were dead in your sins.”** What are you and I like by nature? What is our original condition? We're dead in sin. How can you and I be sure that we're actually dead? Every time we do what God forbids or fail to do what God commands, we imitate Adam and Eve in their rebellion. We earn God's condemnation of death too. Like someone who allows his debt to get completely out of control, we earn for ourselves an impossibly huge burden of debt—the debt of guilt for sin.

If you still don't think you're dead in your trespasses and sins, just look at your life in the light of God's holy Law—his Ten Commandments. Have you always faithfully carried out your responsibilities as a husband, wife, or single person, as a parent, grandparent, or child, as an employer, employee, or retiree, as a teacher or a student? Have you always loved God with all your heart, gladly heard his Word, and patiently endured affliction? Have you ever been disobedient, proud, or unforgiving? Have you ever been selfish, lazy, envious, or quarrelsome? Have you ever lied or deceived, taken something not yours, or given anyone a bad name? Have you ever abused your body in any way or permitted indecent thoughts to linger in your mind? Have you ever failed to do what is right and good? That certificate of debt just keeps getting longer and longer, doesn't it?

When you and I consider how endless our list of guilt upon guilt against God really is, what can we do? It's a gut punch of reality that makes us fall to our knees and can plunge us into despair. Where can we possibly find comfort and rescue from this reality that we are dead in trespasses and sin?

You won't find comfort and rescue in the company of fellow sinners. God's holy justice will not permit anyone unholy into heaven. You won't find comfort and rescue in the appearance of innocence. The fact is, you've been dying from the moment your life began. With every sin from that moment, whether you were aware of it or not, you've been racking up an impossible load of debt. For every sin, you've earned death, and **“the soul that sins is the one that will die.”** (Ezekiel 18:20) You won't find comfort and rescue in acts of charity that earn you praise. The sad reality is that any work apart from Christ, no matter how great it seems, will only demonstrate how far you have fallen short of God's holiness. You won't find comfort and rescue on the outside from your spiritual death. Surely you won't find it on the inside either, so where can you go?

¹ Adapted from a 2010 Lenten sermon series by Pr. Wayne Laitinen and published by Northwestern Publishing House.

² Scott Keith. *Being Dad: Father as a Picture of God's Grace*. (Irvine, California: New Reformation Press, 2015), 38.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden once more. Why didn't God cut off Adam and Eve from this life? Why didn't he wipe them out at the very moment they disobeyed him? The answer is found in God's grace—his undeserved love for sinners like you and me. The Lord in his grace raised them back to life with the promise of a death to come—the death of his one and only Son. God told Satan, ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."*** (Genesis 3:15) Yet the Lord didn't stop with Adam and Eve. No, in his grace, in his undeserved love, the Lord still raises us back to life, not with a promise, but with a death that did take place on a cross 2,000 years ago. ***"When you were dead in trespasses..., God made you alive with Christ."***

There on the cross, God made us alive with Christ. He brought us from death to life. To make us alive, he ***"forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate to debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed us..."*** The holy God had every right to condemn us to eternal death. We had lived lives of rebellion against him, but Jesus stepped in and erased our debt. ***"He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross."***

When you and I look to the cross, we do see death. We recognize it as Jesus gives his life. Yet there we also see love and life for us too. Your dear Savior cries from the cross, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** (Mark 15:34), and you see his love! In undying, undeserved love, God turned the full brunt of his punishment on his Son, so he could turn the full focus of his love towards you.

With the blood of Jesus, your endless certificate of debt and mine were erased. With the death of Jesus, those certificates of debt were nailed to the cross. They were removed from evidence where the holy judge could see our guilt no longer. In so doing, God made us alive with Christ! He declared us not guilty and raised us from death to life because Jesus suffered actual death for us.

Think about that! Consider the cost of God's unbelievable love for us! During Jesus' life on earth, his heavenly Father testified not just once but twice that he loved his Son and his Son was well-pleasing to him. That God would make the conscious decision to let his sinless Son die in our place takes our breath away. That God's Son willingly went to his death an innocent man is amazing grace. Yet that amazing grace not only took Jesus to death on a cross, but also to victory over death and our enemies.

"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him." Here the Apostle recalls a victory parade after a Roman military campaign. The streets of the victors overflowed with cheering spectators. Garlands of flowers were placed around the necks of the general and other officers. Loud cheers and the smell of incense filled the air. Enemy soldiers were publicly disgraced and marched through the streets prodded on by swords and spears. The victors rode or marched triumphantly ahead of the defeated to a public place where the defeated were put to death.

When Jesus brought us from death to life, he disarmed our enemies and publicly disgraced them. Satan and your sinful nature constantly try to condemn you, to fill you with renewed guilt and fear of God's wrath, but Jesus disarmed the powers of darkness when he died on the cross. They thought they had defeated the Son of God himself, but the truth is, the cross of Christ made a public spectacle of all our spiritual enemies.

At the hour of his death, an earthquake opened the graves of a number of local believers who had died earlier. They came out of their graves alive! Yet that was a preview of the worldwide freedom that would come three days later. On Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead. His body did not suffer decay. Instead, by abandoning that tomb, Jesus declared to the whole world that death had lost its sting, that life had conquered death—even ours. One day, when Jesus returns, we will see the ultimate result of that victory when Christ will make all things new and raise all believers to the eternal glories of heaven.

"In order to be raised from the dead, one must actually first be dead." By nature, we are dead in sin, and unless Christ returns first, we will all face death. Yet by the death of Christ on the cross, we have life in Christ. God made us alive with Christ so now we are living sacrifices to him. Now we live out our God-given callings in meaningful activity for his kingdom not just at church, but in our homes and classrooms and workplaces and neighborhoods.

When we open our mouths, we want the world to hear Jesus' voice. We want to use our hands for works of mercy to those who live around us so they can see the mercy of Jesus through us. Being alive with Christ means we want to use our God-given resources—our time, our talent, our treasures—to share the good news of Jesus here and abroad. We were dead, but now we live with Christ. May God, who made us alive with Christ, enable us to live for Christ here and hereafter! Amen.