

Romans 6:5-11 2nd Sunday of Easter April 19, 2020

John 20: 19-23

It's another beautiful day here, and wherever you are, because Christ has risen from death and His life-giving power reaches to the ends of the earth. Though we are a week past Easter Sunday we can still say: Happy Easter! In fact, every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection power of God. So earth-shattering was Christ's resurrection from the dead that believers changed worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Sunday) – the day of resurrection. So, let us celebrate again the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what it means for you and me!

The Gateway to Life

Last week I spoke of the Cross as the gateway to life, and that may seem an improbable, if not preposterous, way to talk about Easter. How could an instrument of execution be the gateway to life? Yet it was part of God's plan of redemption, and the basis for understanding resurrection.

Ever since humanity fell into the temptation to act as though equal to God, it has been on a path of arrogance and sinful destruction that only leads to death. On the Cross God judged all the sin of humanity and triumphed over it. All the sinfulness of all humanity – including yours & mine - was nailed to the Cross with Jesus and died there with Him. *He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.* 1 Peter 2:24.

Though we did not die with Him physically we participate in His death. How does that happen? When I make a moral decision that sin in my life must die - not be suppressed, counteracted, limited, but crucified - that is when I participate in His crucifixion.¹ That is what Paul was talking about in the Bible: *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...*

Romans 6:6.

Perhaps that is the hardest thing to do: make the moral decision that sin must die in your life ... completely, totally, thoroughly. We think we can handle it, limit it, as though we know the limits of sin in our lives (and the world, for that matter). I have found as I've grown older just how deep and pervasive is sin in my life. Although I may not be as prone to selfish behavior as much as before, I still find it hard to allow God into all my decision-making. Am I prepared to let the Holy Spirit search me and know me in the depths of my soul, and then agree with God's verdict on my bent toward sin – that it should be nailed to the cross with Jesus? Yet, right there, on the Cross, He has made it possible for every man, woman, and child to get into right relationship with God.

Replace The Old

If the old, sinful me dies, what becomes of me? Last week I said Christ's resurrection means that you can obtain a new lease on life ... get a whole new you. The resurrection life of Jesus – that is, a new life dead to sin – is available now and it will show as I become more and more like Him in character. I do not lose my personality, yet who I am becomes more like the new and true me that God is shaping. [If you think I'm flawed now, just rejoice that in Jesus I'm not what I used to be. And I hope the same is true for you.] *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his, Romans 6:5.*

When we are baptized, we are drowned in the waters, buried with Christ in His death. There we died to sin. As we rose from those waters, we stepped into Christ's new life. (*If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness, Romans 8:10*). When we arise to receive Him into our life, the old self, trapped in the clutches of sin and death, is replaced by Christ's resurrection life is in us and He has the authority to do it.

Theory and Practice

It took omnipotent power for Jesus to live the life of the Son of God in His mortal body; He called upon His Heavenly Father often. We too need supernatural power to live this new, resurrected life.

Last week I quoted Yogi Berra: "In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is." Don't we know this from our own experiences as Christians? So many of us struggle to be holy and righteous like Jesus, exercising our own power, and we are frustrated with the results. When we are pressured, like when someone annoys us, or crosses us, or puts us down, or hurts us, or mischaracterizes us, we easily forget the life of Jesus in us and react in the manner of the old self still bound to the way of the world, mired in sin. You know, "an eye for an eye" and "look out for number one." We discover that our old self, that was supposed to die to sin, is still clinging to us, trying to drag us back into the grave; wanting to pull us back into the darkness of this world's old reality.

But we have a new identity: no longer captives of sin, we are a new creation in Christ. Once we allow our "old self" to share the death of Jesus, the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit will invade us and our living. The Holy Spirit cannot be an occasional guest in our lives, called upon to show up when we feel a need or want something extraordinary to happen. He must invade every nook and cranny of our souls. It's not a matter of praying now and then for help with something difficult in your life. No, it's getting into the habit of daily inviting the Holy Spirit to invade every corner of your life, to fill and replace the old sinful nature with the new, holy nature. I'm talking about inviting supernatural power into your life. Only by the same power that raised Christ

from the dead are we able to live the new life He gives. After His resurrection Jesus came to His disciples locked in their upper room saying, *Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.* And then He said, *Receive the Holy Spirit,* John 20:21-22.

Eternal Life

Once we have made the moral decision that sin must die in us, the energy and power we see in Jesus will become energy and power in us ... resurrection power ... which is life eternal. Eternal life is not a gift *from* God, it is a gift *of* God.² Before His ascension Jesus said to his disciples: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,* Acts 1:8. He did not mean power as a gift from the Holy Spirit given over to our use. The power is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and is Jesus with us. Any bit of our own energy will only blur the life of Jesus.

Eternal life has very little to do with time ... how could it? ... it's eternal. It's a life outside the confines of the old, fallen-into-sin life that leads to an end of life. Eternal life is in God. *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent,* John 17:3. Ours is to let go of that old life that clings to us, and to constantly invite the Holy Spirit to invade every aspect of our lives, reshaping our character after the character of the New Man, Jesus Christ.

Ours The Cross, The Grave, The Skies

The image of Samiu is still in my mind today. I picture him taking my suitcase in hand as I stepped off the boat, having just arrived in Ha'apai for the Annual Conference of the FWCT. Graciously He escorted me along sandy streets to the guest home where I was to stay for the week. At the theological college, where he had been a student, I got to know Samiu and his amazing story. Some years prior he had been lost at sea for many, many days and nearly perished. After that harrowing experience, he got serious about his faith in God. No longer was he a nominal Christian "doing church," he became a passionate follower of Christ, whose character began to take on a gentle strength and confidence, that, despite his large stature and physical strength, had before been lacking. When I came to know him, he was already well on his way to becoming a genuine servant of Christ.

Or there was Ted. He retired from teaching as professor of Political Science from a nearby college. (He actually began his teaching career at Bakersfield College). He had always belonged to church, believed in the tenants of the Christian faith, and was generally a good guy. I was surprised, though, when he came to me and said he'd like to teach Sunday School ... the junior high group, no less! So, he did and did it very well. His joy at sharing the faith with

those kids was infectious – and probably Holy Spirit power gave him the strength to teach junior high kids.

Some get a new lease on life and begin a new life in Christ after a traumatic experience: near death due to illness or accident, death of a spouse or a child, loss of job and career, severe financial loss. These things can be the catalyst that turns one from the path of self-centered sin to a life with God. For others it is a gradual dawning of the truth and reality of Christ's resurrection power in one's life. Either way it is the power of resurrection that gives new and true life.

One of our Easter hymns proclaims this biblical and eternal truth: "Soar we now where Christ has led, Following our exalted Head, Made like him, like him we rise, Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies."

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Romans 8:11.

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, April 11.

² Ibid, April 12.