

Sermon Text for June 11, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 40:28-31, Romans 6:5-11

“Alive!”

The providence of God takes my breath away sometimes. This Sunday is one of those times. When I planned out these sermons in the beginning of May I never dreamed we would find ourselves today facing a reality which is so strangely woven of heartache and pain because of the presence of death. I had planned for this Sunday for it to be an Easter Sunday in June. Paul talks about the resurrection, I was going to talk about the resurrection, never realizing how badly we need to talk about the resurrection today. I can't imagine hearing from Scripture about anything else.

It is Trinity Sunday when liturgically we are supposed to look at the concept of the Trinity and how it has such an impact upon our life that it ought to be transformative. I am not going to delve into much at all, just share an experience I had two weeks ago. I was in my yard and a car drove up my driveway and a person dressed in a suit came out, one person, not two. He was with the Jehovah witnesses and I enjoy speaking with them because inevitably I can get them to a point where they are confronted with the truth of Scripture and have to rethink, or ignore, their understandings based upon Scripture. We ended up talking about the Trinity and his eyes lit up and he triumphantly proclaimed, well, the Trinity is not in the Bible. He knew he had me. I said, well, actually it is, look at Matthew 28:19. He did and he read it, someone read it, see, he said, the word Trinity is not mentioned. I said I agree, but the concept of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is. He was silent for at least 10 seconds and he looked at me and said, have a good day and he left.

What we believe actually affects our life. I know, many of you would rather leave this concept of the resurrection to the theologians. It is not something that keeps us up at night. But Paul thinks it is pretty important. Read I Corinthians 15:14 that if there is no resurrection then our faith is in vain. That should make us pause and realize that the resurrection is not just for theologians to understand but for each of us to know that we believe that each of one of us will be raised from the dead. Who needs to hear that message today after this week's events?

Today we are going to be reminded by Paul that not only are we to be dead to sin and what that means, but we are to be alive, alive in Christ. Christian life is not tedious,

it is not puritanical, it is not a following of rules, but it is life, it is freedom in Christ.

Hopefully today we will be reminded of what it means to be alive, alive in Christ.

READ SCRIPTURE

A young boy went with his father to the theater and in the intermission they had a Shakespearean expert read Psalm 23 in the Old King James Version and it was perfect and impeccable. At the end the crowd applauded and gave a standing ovation. Then a man walked up on the stage and read the same Psalm 23, he was a farmer with a southern accent. At the end, there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd. The boy on the way home asked his father, why the different responses, and the father answered: the first man knew Psalm 23. The second man knew the shepherd.

What we do here on Sundays, what we do here during the week is for the primary purpose of giving life to you and the community. What we do here needs to be transformative. This week has caused me to do a lot of introspection not just about myself, but about this family that I love and that I serve. Is what we are doing transformative? We need to be alive in all that we do. Is our worship transformative or are we just checking boxes and saying that we have done what we needed to do, so we worshipped? Or are we actually laying the groundwork for the Holy Spirit to come and breathe His life among us? Can we in any way structure it so that the Holy Spirit has an easier time or a harder time to be a part of what we do?

Sometimes I think we reduce the mystery of God to programs and membership and programs are not transformative, membership is not transformative. That is not our primary call. What is transformative, and I was asked this week in my office, what is your vision for this church? I don't think it has changed since I have been here. What is transformative for this church, what my vision for this church has been and continues to be is not about programs and numbers, but the neighborhood. It is about what God is doing in the neighborhood and in the community and less about what we are doing here for self-preservation. This is where I see life and where I see the abundant life that God has planned for us in His kingdom.

Some consider the book of Isaiah as the 5th Gospel because so much of it describes the prophetic arrival of the Messiah and it mimics so closely the life of Christ. It speaks about the life that is promised to us.

But did you notice the promises that Isaiah gives us in these Scriptures are all in the future. Read verse 31, it is all a future promise, but the description of God in the

previous verses is all in the present. Isaiah is saying this is who God is and you are not God, but when you wait on the Lord, when you are in Christ this is what will happen. The life that we ought to live today is predicated on the promises that we have received about tomorrow.

Paul in these verses in Romans speaks about our benefits in a similar way. Vs. 5 we will be united in a resurrection, vs. 8 we will live with him. Much of our Christian hope is found in the future. The promise of eternal life is a promise that many see as something that only takes place in the future. Well, if that is the case, that our benefits of being united in Christ only pertain to the future then what does that mean for our life in the here and now?

What gain is there for us to live in any certain way if it has no bearing upon who we will truly be in Christ come the day of resurrection? Paul doesn't only leave us in the future to receive our prize. He states in verse 7 that whoever has died is freed from sin. Our present reality is that when we become one with Christ on this earth our sin dies and we ought to make it a point to make sure it dies. Jesus went so far as to say in Mark 9:43-48 **READ SCRIPTURE**

Before I could be ordained as a pastor I had to work for the summer in a hospital to get a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. I worked as a chaplain at St. Joseph's hospital in Tacoma, Washington, and I was called to wait on a patient who was on the surgical unit. I don't even remember his name. He was sure that he was to follow these verses completely and to the letter. So he had cut off his hand and then his other arm. He had cut off his nose, and there were definite mental health issues. But he would listen and we would talk. Is this what it means when Paul states that we are now to be alive to God in Christ Jesus? Hardly.

Verse 11 takes us to the present, to the here and now. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. This describes the here and now. No one can be alive to God except in Christ Jesus. Christ has provided the laws by which life is governed, love God and love your neighbor, Christ is the living bread and the eternal water which is our nourishment and by which our life is sustained, Christ is the goal in our life, here and now, to which all of our energies are directed.

The question today is do we feel alive not because of something else that is happening in our lives which may be with us now but then next week will disappear. Do

we feel alive because we are in Christ and in Christ we have the promises of sin no longer having a hold on us and life being marked by freedom.

Jesus tells Martha who is weeping because her brother Lazarus has died: I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, will live. Jesus is not only the resurrection, the goal of eternal life after which we all strive, but he is also the life, our life in the here and now.

So often as we live our lives we miss the life that Jesus wants for us. Moses almost walked past the burning bush because he was so busy with his work in keeping the sheep. The bush had been burning the whole time but Moses was the only who was actually moving slow enough to notice. We fill our lives with things that take up our time and suck the life out of us. What burning bushes are out there that we have just passed by. I think of every single child that walks in this church, I have always said as soon as a person walks into this church, they are our responsibility. Carola, Bella, and Noah walked into this church many, many times. God was able to be manifested to them through you. You were that burning bush out of which God's voice was able to speak and give life. No one can be alive except in Christ.

You know the book of Lamentations, that book of complaints, has some of the most alive verses in all of Scripture. Chapter 3:22-23 states the Steadfast love of the morning endures forever his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness. Tomorrow morning when we wake up we will receive new mercies, Tuesday morning 100% brand spanking new mercies, Wednesday morning brand new mercies and Thursday, and Friday and Saturday and then we have to look forward to another week, month, year and life of new mercies every morning.

This is what it means to be alive in Christ, to have the confidence and the joy of living that can only come from Christ. Amen.