

Wanted: Dead and Alive
Romans 6:1-11
June 25, 2023

When I read a scripture passage, I notice a word or phrase that jumps out at me and stays in my mind. I consider that as a nudge from the Holy Spirit. In our scripture passage today, it is the phrase “alive in Christ.” It sounds wonderful, doesn’t it? This was my original title for this sermon: “Alive in Christ.” What does it really mean to be alive in Christ? To dig deeper into what means.

So as I began to read commentaries and other sermons on this passage, they all talked about sin, which is a major part of this passage. I didn’t want to talk about sin. I wanted to talk about being alive in Christ! I wanted to be positive. But the more I looked at this passage, the more I realized that in order to fully understand being alive in Christ, we need to talk about sin. We need to talk about being dead.

Think about the resurrection. In order to have a resurrection, you need a death. In order to talk about being alive in Christ, you need a death. In order to realize how blessed we are in Christ, how alive we are in Christ, and in order to fully appreciate the greatness of the grace of God shown to us, we need to start with death and sin.

So let’s begin.

Imagine you were in a car accident, you are unconscious, and your car is in danger of blowing up. Seemingly out of nowhere, someone runs to your car and pulls you out just before the car does blow up. You are not breathing and the person who pulled you out begins CPR until the paramedics arrive. There was nothing you could do for yourself because you were dead. You were saved by someone else. Being saved had nothing to do with you.

Paul tells us we’re dead, and we cannot save ourselves. This can be said in two different ways. We are dead in sin without Christ and dead to sin in Christ.

We are dead in sin.

Author Walker Percy conducted an experiment asking people to check which of the following statements applied to them:

1. You are extraordinarily generous and a loving person.
2. You are the most selfish, hateful, the most treacherous, the most frightened, and phoniest person.

Sixty percent of all respondents chose both.

In each of us is the capacity for good and evil. We are capable of love and compassion. Yet, we are also capable of hatred, cruelty, and self-destruction. We have discovered cures to save us from terrible diseases. Yet, we have also developed weapons of mass destruction. We have started wonderful charities to help people in need. Yet, we also have been the source of terrible tragedies. We can harness energy from oil, the wind and the sun. Yet, we have damaged our environment to the point where we are all at risk.

Scripture says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). In the Bible, sin defined as something that pulls us away from God, a wrong turn in the direction of our lives.

Remember in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobey God, and their immediate reaction was to hide from God. What they did pulled them away from their Creator.

Every single person has sinned. Even the really good person. And it is hard for us to admit it.

To lighten things up just a bit: It is hard to say I am wrong (that we fall short of the glory of God!). It's easy to blame someone else. This is what people said on their insurance forms when explaining their car accident:

- The other car collided with mine without giving warning of his intention.
- The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.
- In an attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole.
- The pedestrian had no idea which way to go, so I ran over him.
- I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and headed over the embankment.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We just don't like to admit it.

The Bible also says this: “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Our human nature cries out for justice. When we hear of children being molested, old people attacked in their home, people killed in a mass shooting, we want the people who have done these things to be arrested and punished.

For example, I read the digital version of my home town newspaper, Minneapolis. The big story in Mpls was a man trying to out-drive police and hit another car with 5 teenage girls in it. The girls were getting ready for a wedding the next day. All 5 girls were killed, and the suspect ran away. (He was later caught). As I read this story, I want this man to be punished. To the max. I want justice for these women and their families.

The wages of sin is death, or the wages of sin is separation from God, a cutting off from God. From Isaiah 59: 1-2 “Your iniquities have separated you from your God, your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear you.” You are dead in sin, separated from God.

But our scripture passage gives us our hope: **We are dead to sin in Christ.**

In order understand why we are dead to sin in Christ, you need to understand the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. In the temple was an altar where people brought their perfect lamb to be sacrificed by the priest. Since the wages of sin was death, the death of the lamb became the substitution death for the person. This was a picture of sin passing from the person to the animal and the animal was sacrificed in the person’s place. This was a picture to help the people realize the seriousness of sin, this separation from God.

However, when Jesus came, he became the final sacrifice. He became the sacrificial lamb. I Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed.”

You often hear the term “you are saved.” Romans 10:9 says if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. We are saved from death or separation from God, both now and forever. We are saved to a restored relationship with God, both now and forever.

Paul gives the example of baptism. In Jesus' time, people went down into the waters to be baptized. It represented death. You die to yourself as you go down in the water. It's as if we were crucified with Christ. Then as we rise out of the water, we are raised to a new resurrected life. As Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised with him. We are alive to a new life in Christ.

We may not feel it all the time, but a transformation has taken place. We are alive to God in Christ. Because Christ lives, we live. Because Christ was raised, we are raised. Because Christ was glorified, we are glorified. This is amazing. And it is all because of God's grace.

In chapter 5 of Romans, the chapter just before our scripture passage, Paul writes that God's grace in Jesus is the answer to human sin.

Now don't get ideas he says at the beginning of our passage. Don't even begin to think that if you sin more that gives God a chance to extend more grace to us. In this way, grace will increase! So, let's just keep on sinning

Paul answers: of course not! This is a nice way of saying, "You've got to be kidding." Or, "May it never be!" or, "God forbid!" Or, Don't you dare...because if we are alive in Christ, we are to live it. Or, Paul is saying, "Be who you are."

Think of a parent and child. The child offends, and the parent says to the child, "This is not like you. I raised you better than that." So Paul says to a baptized person, "you are dead to sin, so stop acting as if you are capable of it. Be who you are." Alive in Christ.

There are times on a Sunday morning when we pastors stand up here and says, "Remember your baptism." If you were baptized as an infant, that is rather difficult to do. This does not mean remember the time or place, rather remember who you are, remember who you belong to. You are dead to sin and alive in Christ. You are dead and alive.

Being alive in Christ does not mean we will be in a constant state of smiles and joy, and always doing right. Being alive in Christ is recognizing we are in relationship with God. Being alive in Christ is wanting to deepen that relationship through prayer, worship, study.

Being alive in Christ is walking in the Spirit and allowing the fruit of the Spirit to develop in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Being alive in Christ means your foundation is so strong that even when the storms of life come, you can live through them.

Being alive in Christ is loving others rather than promoting self-interest.

Being alive in Christ is using the gift God has given you to serve others, whether that gift is teaching or hospitality or giving or encouraging or leadership.

Being alive in Christ is not holding grudges and loving your enemies, even praying for them.

Being alive in Christ is meeting the needs of those less fortunate – the hungry, the poor, the homeless.

Being alive in Christ is visiting the prisoners, anointing and praying for the sick.

In other words, being alive in Christ is acting like Jesus.

You are dead and alive. You are dead to sin because of Jesus. You are alive in Christ. But because we are human, we still mess up. We still do things that pull us away from God. But do not be ashamed. Don't live in fear of rejection. Do not hate yourself. God has made clear, in your baptism, how God feels about you. You have been raised in Christ. You are new. You are loved. You are transformed. Live as such. And when we forget who we are, return to that promise you are a child of God and alive in Christ. Then pick yourself up and move forward.

This is our reality! How marvelous is God's grace! Amen

