

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Theme: Love that Can Raise the Dead

If only love could raise the dead, there would be a lot of people and pets who have left this life, who would still be living today. Death is a horrible thing. It cut the deepest bonds that we have. We shed a lot of tears. Many times we grieve for years. Wouldn't be great if the love that we had for that person would bring them back. Think about your favorite dog or other pet, wouldn't it be great if your great love for that pet would have brought it back to life.

You might think that this sounds silly, how can our deep love for someone, bring them back from the dead? Our love can't do it, but today we see that God's great love for us is so powerful that it can raise the dead.

I. Without God's love, we are dead in sin.

Paul writes in Verse 1, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*" He goes on to show that this means three things:

We cannot do anything good. Without Christ, we are slaves to sin. Paul writes, "*All of us also lived among [the disobedient] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.*" Every one of us has the sinful nature which takes pleasure in wicked things. Those desires are different in each one of us. Just as we have different talents, we also have different sinful desires. Without Christ we are dead in sin. We love it! It seems fun to sin. Our thoughts are on what we want, no matter what it does to other people. Life is all about me and what I want. Being dead to sin means living to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature. The thought comes in our mind, and we want to do it.

Second, it means to be an object of wrath. Paul goes on to write, "*Like the rest [of the disobedient] we were objects of wrath.*" Without Christ our animal friends have an advantage over us. They don't have a soul, so when they leave this life, their bodies simply return to dust. However, we have a soul, which is a spirit that is eternal. Death came into this world because of sin, and all

people will die according to the flesh. The Bible is clear that *“The wages of sin is death.”* But after our body becomes lifeless, our spirits continue to live. The question is whether God will call our spirits to His peace and glory in heaven or whether He will send us away from Him and His goodness. The day that Christ returns, He will raise the bodies of every person. We will hear one of two things, either *“Come You who are blessed by My Father....”* or *“Depart from Me You evildoers into the eternal fire prepared for the devil.”* We were objects of wrath. Because of our sins we deserved nothing good from God in this world, and things would only get worse in eternity. Body and soul we could only await the Lord’s punishment and wrath forever as He sends us away from Him and His goodness.

Worst of all, we could not come to God. There is nothing in these verses which speaks of our coming to God or faith being our work. It speaks of how God raise us up and how faith is not from ourselves. It is the gift of God. On our own we will always run from God. We will always choose evil. We are dead in sin. We can choose Christ as much as a dead person can choose to be raised from the dead.

That was our situation as dead in sin: we lived to gratify our sinful desires, we were objects of God’s wrath, and we were unable to come to God and His goodness.

II. But in His great love for us, God has raised us up.

He did it by His love. It is interesting that three very important words for love are in verses 4 and 5.

The first one is the Greek word **“Agape.”** Paul writes in verse 4, *“But because of His great love for us...”* God’s agape love is His sacrificial love for us. It is not just a feeling. It always causes God to act for us. For instance in John 3:16 Jesus says, *“For God so love the world, that He sent His only begotten Son.”* Paul also uses this word in how husbands are to love their wives. In Ephesians 5 he writes, *“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”* It was God’s love for us that caused Him to act. His love caused Him to do something that would raise us from the dead, to stop our bondage to sin, to take away His wrath, and to enable us to do good. His love caused Him to send His Son for our salvation. He would die, so that we would live.

The second word for love is the word **“mercy.”** In verse 4 Paul also writes that God is rich in mercy. I like to define mercy as “God’s love for those who cannot help themselves.” In the Gospels, the people who were sick would cry out, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks at the end, who the neighbor was to the man who was lying almost lifeless on the road. The answer was, *“The one who had mercy on him.”* There was no way that we could help ourselves. We could not free ourselves from sin. We could not come to God. We could not even believe in Him by our own strength. We were powerless. We were dead in sin, but God had mercy on us. He wanted to help those who could not help themselves.

The third word for love is **grace.** In verse 5 and again in verse 8 Paul writes, *“It is by grace you have been saved.”* God’s grace is His undeserved love. We deserve His wrath, but He gives us love that we never deserved. His grace is His forgiveness of sins and every blessing that He gives to us now and eternally.

Listen again to how Paul puts all three of these terms for love together in verses 4 and 5, “*But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved.*” In those two verses Paul makes it clear that God’s love for us has raised people who were dead in sin. He made us alive with Christ. He has taken away our sin and given us a new birth as His people.

This rebirth is given through faith. In verse 8 Paul writes that it is by grace that we have been saved through faith. Faith always has an object. A few months ago many of us trusted that our investments would give us some needed income. They disappointed us. As children we trust that our parents will provide what we need, and hopefully they are trustworthy. As Christians our faith is in Christ. We trust that He paid for all of our sins on the cross. We trust that His resurrection is the assurance that we will live forever in His glory. We trust that by being baptized in His name we are reborn as the children of God. Our faith is in Him as our Savior. It is through faith that God raises us from the dead and gives us new life in Christ.

But it is important to realize that this faith is not our work. It is a gift of God. Paul also writes in verses 8 “*and this [faith] is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*” Faith in Christ is God’s gift. It is something that we are eternally grateful for. The reason why I believe and someone else doesn’t, isn’t because faith is a work that I did. It is because in His grace, God’s Spirit moved my heart to trust in Jesus as my Savior. That faith in Christ is the greatest gift that God has given to any of us.

God’s love raises us up to do good works. In verse 10 Paul writes that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. God raised us from the dead for a purpose. He has a plan for the life of each one of His people. There is something which He is planning to do through your life to His glory. Sometimes people think that our quest in life to is to try to figure out what God wants to do through us. We need to discover our spiritual gifts and figure out what our niche is, so that our Christian life is not wasted. It’s that hard. If God’s love was powerful enough to raise you from spiritual death, He’ll be able to place you in situations in which you will be able to use the gifts that He gave you. Very often, we don’t even know the times and places where God has used us the most. The reason for that is probably so that we can’t boast. As we look to Christ and trust in Him, God does use us in wonderful ways to bring His love, His mercy, and His grace into this world.

God’s love is much more powerful than anything in this world. It is so powerful that it can even raise people like us who are dead in sin by giving us faith in Christ and enabling us to live as Christ. May His love raise us from our sins and keep us focused on Christ, that we may receive the life, both now and forever that He promises us by grace.

Amen.

Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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