

Life Outside the Tomb

For the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus has set you free...

Romans 8:2

April 19, 2020

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Prayer - Holy Spirit, we take you for granted. We set you aside. We tend to look past what it is you are doing. Let it be no more. Open our eyes to your movement. Open our heart and mind to who you are and what you are doing in our midst, even now. Amen

Message - We will never be the same. Our lives have been changed. We cannot be the same as we were. And it is not because of Covid19! It is because Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed. Say it with me, Christ is risen - Christ is risen indeed.

Humanity hasn't been the same since. Some 2,000 years ago, followers of Jesus witnessed the very best of people and the very worst of people. Followers of Jesus, saw the crowds gather in praise and excitement; with anticipation and joy on their lips. A few days later, they witnessed the crowds gather in a mob-like fashion with anger and hatred on their lips.

In the span of a week, Jesus went from a celebrated King to a crucified criminal, was dead and put in a tomb. It didn't look like anything was going to be any different. It didn't look like anything was going to change. It didn't look like anything the followers of Jesus had been about while he was with them mattered at all or made any impact.

God knew different. Jesus knew better. And the Holy Spirit was about to make it happen. Because of what happened early in the morning on the first day of the week, when the women went to the tomb and found it empty, we are not the same. The Spirit of God made the impossible possible and moved that stone.

The Spirit didn't have to do that. Jesus would have risen anyway, cause that was the plan and promise all along. Jesus didn't need the tombstone rolled away, we did! We had to see it to know that there would be life outside the tomb, and Jesus was and is that life.

There are tombs all around us church; tombs that keep us from living our full and resurrected life with Christ, tombs that convince us we are not enough or not worthy, tombs that haunt us with things from our past. There are tombs of oppression, injustice, illness, grief, anger, bitterness, and prejudice.

Dear church - people of God, did you not hear what the women said upon returning? The tomb is empty! The tomb is empty. The Spirit of God has defeated the tomb. Jesus lives. AND that means there is new life to be lived for us; life outside the tombs we find ourselves in.

That life is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in the book of Romans. Called the Himalayas of the bible often referred by many as the greatest chapter in all of the bible, the book of Romans chapter eight brings to light the foundation of life outside the tomb - in other words, life with Jesus, led by God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

For the next 5 weeks we invite you to hike through the themes, lessons, and teachings found in Romans chapter eight. We will be reminded and/or discover truths about the work of the Holy Spirit, in all aspects of our lives; who we are, our prayer life, God in the midst of pain and suffering, and the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God. We want to highlight the presence and work of the Holy Spirit especially in times when we think or feel disconnected, or like nothing is happening, or everything is different...in times like now living in the midst of Covid19; adjusting to day by day schedules, coping with having to distance ourselves physically from family and friends, dealing with emotional and mental well being, establishing a routine when there is no routine, and much more.

The Spirit of God is with us. The Spirit of God is at work among us. The Spirit of God is nothing to be taking for granted, not now, not ever.

Hear these words from the beginning of Romans 8:1-11 and just for fun, listen to how many times you hear the word “spirit.”

How many times did you hear the word “spirit” in those eleven verses? In the translation I read from, The Message, it was 5 times in 11 verses. In the NRSV, the word spirit is used 8 times in those 11 verses. In the whole chapter it is used no less than 20 times. When a word is repeated that many times in a short section, we need to pay attention.

Paul is telling those early believers and us, to pay attention. Pay attention to the spirit! Why? Because the same spirit that was moving tombstones and raising the dead with Jesus is the spirit moving in and around us and it changes lives. The spirit is moving all the time. The spirit is power. The spirit is gentleness. The spirit is the very presence and essence of God and Jesus. It empties tombs. We need to pay attention.

When Paul uses the word Spirit it comes with an understanding of pneuma in Greek and ruach in Hebrew; both speak of a kind of power, force and in hebrew a mighty wind. When he uses the word flesh it comes from the greek word “sarx.” Throughout the text, Paul used the word in three ways. Two were common ways of using the word sarx and the third was all Paul. No one else. The most common use of the word literally, means the physical aspects and attributes of the human body. The second common use means “according to human flesh - or according to human understanding and human point of view as opposed to a divine point of view” Those were fairly common understandings of the word.

But Paul had a use of the word sarx all his own. When he was talking of the Christians, the followers of Jesus, he talked about living according to the flesh -

living according to or within the human condition or human understanding. This use of the word was NOT only about fleshly desires, or sins of the flesh, That is where his contemporaries stopped with the word sarx.

Paul expanded the use of the word. It was about how we live our lives - the place of understanding that we live our life from. So it wasn't only about bodily and sexual sins which drive a wedge between us and God and gets everyone riled up and makes the church uncomfortable; BUT it was also about idolatry, hatred, envy, gluttony, political dissension, exertion of power, and contention for superiority. For Paul it was all of it.

In other words Paul was saying, as followers of Jesus, do you live a life dominated by the dictates and desires of human nature or a life dominated by the dictates and love of God? Do you / we live a life focussed and centered on self; whose only law or rule is its own desires? Or do we live a life focussed and centered on Jesus?

Paul basically tells the believers one kind of life leads to a sealed tomb; literally and metaphorically; it moves farther away from God and ends in physical and spiritual death. The other kind of life leads to an empty tomb; a life with steady progress to God and with God.

One leads to a life inside the tomb and the other to life outside the tomb.

It is time church, to live life outside the tomb. It is time to allow the Spirit of God to roll away the tombstone and empower you to walk in new life. To live, in spite of covid19, a life that is centered in Jesus and draws us closer to God and one another; a life that sees beauty, goodness, and truth, amidst and beyond the ugly, bad, and lies that surround us; a life where we can be our authentic selves, and love others for who they are or where they are on their path of faith; a life where yes grief, pain, and brokenness occur yet at our core was can have peace, hope and even joy.

We will never be the same. Our lives have been changed. We cannot be the same as we were. And it is not because of Covid19 or any other circumstance or situation. It is because Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed. May our life outside the tomb reveal such truth! Amen.

Sources Consulted:

Homileticsonline.com

William Barclay Daily Bible Study Series - Romans