

Sermon- A Question of Life and Death

Scripture: John 20:1-18, Rom 8:12-17

Sunday, April 1, 2018

We are going to pause our journey through the Gospel of John to focus on the incredible Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the events of Holy week, I believe that Jesus Christ was teaching us something profound not only about His death and His life and about our own as well. Now in the human realm we use the phrase “life and death” in that order right? That is because in our human experience that is the sequence that we observe. Life comes first and then when life ends, we call that death, muerte in Spanish, mrithyu in Hindhi, Maranam in Malayalam. But Jesus Christ through the events of this week is actually telling us that the real sequence of events is actually quite the opposite. In God’s economy, death comes first and then life. That is the meaning of Christ’s death and Resurrection. That is what we are going to unpack today.

When I was in seminary 13 years ago, we had a fascinating class on medical ethics. And one of the questions we had to deal with was the definition of death. In the medical world, it turns out that this is a complex question. But as per the simple medical definition, “Death is defined as the cessation of all vital functions of the body including the heartbeat, brain activity (including the brain stem), and breathing.” What is the legal definition of death? Legally a person is death when a medical doctor issues a certificate of death. How about the spiritual definition of death? A person is spiritually dead when they do not have a relationship with God. In the story of the prodigal son that Jesus tells, the story ends with the Father saying these words, “for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.” Because the Father in the story stood for God and because the real relationship between the Father and the Prodigal son only started after the son’s return, it was as if the son was dead in the spiritual sense but upon is living has started a new spiritual life.

If we were to broaden the story of the prodigal son out to include the story of human life starting at birth, we have to ask the question, when does our relationship with God start. If we start at the beginning, do we have a relationship with God at birth? No. Actually, when a child is born he or she does not have a relationship with anybody. In fact the child does not even know that it is an individual being who exists separately from its mother to have a relationship with the mother or anyone else for that matter. But when the child grows just a few months old, it slowly develops a sense of self. And that's when it starts to form relationships. A later stage of development is when the child develops a sense of right and wrong. At that point what do you think the child will do? You can be sure that it will deliberately choose what it knows to be wrong. Not because the child is particularly bad, but because it, like every child is simply following its human nature. So where is God in this stage of life? Well, God is working in the background. Protecting the child, engineering external circumstances and wooing the child towards himself. But within the child itself, God is simply another stranger in its life. So is this child spiritually alive? Well, Isaiah 59: 2 says, "It's your sins that have cut you off from God.

Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore." So the Bible says that when we sin God hides his face from us. And Rom 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death". So what is our spiritual state then? We are spiritually dead from the time we commit our first sin. And because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam you can be sure that it did not take any of us very long at all to committed our first sin. And the moment we sin, we are spiritually dead.

Now in our spiritual deadness, as we move about in this world, the Bible also tells us that the forces of this world pull at us in such a way that we are completely preoccupied with the world and its lusts. And that preoccupation with the things of this world ensures that we permanently stuck in our spiritual deadness

Now, into this world comes Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ's relationship with the world is like no other human being. Even though he is in the world, he does not allow himself to be tainted by this world. How does he do that? Consider about this. For three years he ministered among his people, teaching and doing amazing things. Then finally, he is recognized by almost everyone in Israel and on Palm Sunday, he is welcomed into the capital of his home nation as the Savior. It is like the moment when you are elected President of the United States and you get to step onto the inaugural stage to give a big speech. At that moment, you literally have the whole world's attention. On Palm Sunday, Jesus Christ had the attention of the whole Jewish nation, because the whole Jewish diaspora was in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. They were shouting Hosanna, hosanna, literally Save us, save us. On Palm Sunday, Jesus was the hope of all his people. They had heard about the miracles he performed, and Jesus himself was sending the message that he was the Messiah that was prophesied, the one greater than Moses, the one who is the fulfillment of the prophecies of sacred scripture. People may not have understood everything, but they understood just enough to think that Jesus able to fix the problems that they thought they had. That was Sunday. Anyone who was even slightly intoxicated by the crowds and the attention would have done everything they would to hold on to the crowds admiration. But Jesus? Well, see for yourself. Because when Monday came, Jesus had this massive show down in the temple with the most important Jewish religious authorities instead of standing up to the Roman oppressors. Now the religious leaders had never really taken a shine to Jesus, and when the temple cleansing happened they said, enough is enough, we need to finish this Jesus. And instead of playing the genius commander of the army who could take on even the mighty Romans, in a matter of days Jesus gets captured. That is like being checkmated in the opening moves of the game. That is embarrassingly bad is you have ever been in that position. And saviors who are losers, lose there shine real quick.

And that turns the peoples' sentiments towards Jesus from hope to hate. And their chants turn from "Save us" to "crucify him" almost overnight.

And from that point on for Jesus it was death by a thousand blows. You see for Jesus to be hated by the religious leaders was no small thing. You see, the temple was His Father's house. For Jesus to see the people who were supposed to be closest to God in his house, hating him, the closest thing to that experience for us to imagine would be to go to your house one day and notice that all your family, your parents, your spouse, your children, your uncles and aunts, all of them looking at you as someone alien who not only do they not recognize but they also see you as someone so evil that they need to eliminate you right away. In your Father's house. Would'nt that make you feel like something just died in you? That was his Father's house! Then imagine when the vast crowds of people thought that Jesus was worse than Barabbas, the thief and murderer. Imagine the blow of that rejection! That was his chosen nation, chosen from all the nations of the world .What about when 1 of his chosen 12 betrays him and the other 11 run away. Can you see something dying in Jesus everytime he is rejected by a group of people? Now what about when the Roman soldiers really went at him with all their strength and brutality? And you have to remember that what keeps us alive as human beings is our human instinct of self-preservation. It is hard wired in our brains. So if we sense danger, we are programmed to fight or flee. If we are cut or burnt, we are programed to jerk our bodies away from the pain. If we are drowning we are programed to gasp for breath. Do you know you cannot kill yourself by holding your breath? You just cannot. Your body will override you and make you breath again. So imagine Jesus with all these self preservation instincts having to just stand there and take it. Actually if someone who is weak and is clobbered by someone who is strong, the weak person has no choice but to take it, right? But in Jesus case, who was the stronger one? It was Jesus. Because he knew that in one second he could call a legion of angels and they would have stopped the crucifixion in a flash. He had that power and I am sure was tempted to

use it till the end. But he did not. He wanted to demonstrate that God's plan can override even the strongest instinct of self-preservation. This was in itself another kind of death.

And we still have not talked about the death from taking on the sin of the whole world. He knew the Isaiah 59: 2 verse which said, "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear." Imagine Jesus having to feel the absence of God. You see the cross was not just killing his body. Around the cross of Jesus Christ, invisible to the naked eye was a perfect spiritual vacuum. That was what it took to kill Jesus. Jesus the strongest human being who every lived, subjected himself to a 1000 deaths and a death by a 1000 blows. This is what Paul is referring to in Phil 2:6 &7

Though he was God,^[a]

he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges^[b];

he took the humble position of a slave. See that verse us telling us that Jesus gave up not just his rights as God, but also his rights as a human being. He gave it all up to go to the cross. And why did he do it? Not just to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world but to show us what it looks like when neither the world nor the flesh nor Satan has any power over our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And that my friends was what Jesus signed up for on his journey from Monday to Friday. He signed up to die a thousand deaths in one.

Now you and I are here because that is not the end of the story, right? Because after Jesus gave up all his rights, and died and was buried, something incredibly beautiful happened. Satan was defeated and the world itself changed forever. God won a battle against sin and death and announced it to the world with Jesus walking out of his tomb.

So what did Jesus get for dying a 1000 deaths in one? Well he got a life that is as bright as a 1000 suns put together. First of all, Jesus even though his post resurrection body looked like any other human body with the marks of the crucifixion on it, Jesus Christ got a body that would never die again. His post resurrection body could eat and drink, but he could also walk through walls, appear and disappear at will and even ascend to heaven as if gravity was only a suggestion. And not only that, Jesus' Spirit was so powerful that he could literally ascend to heaven and blow it on the entire population of earth if he wanted to. Can you imagine the kind of life he received after dying a 1000 deaths?

I want to bring this to you and me though. Now as I mentioned, if you have never put your full faith and trust in Jesus before, because to do that, something inside you had to die, then I want to tell you my friends that that death you might have to undergo is well worth it because of the life you will receive in exchange. So please consider giving your life to Christ today.

But if you have walked any length of time with Jesus, you may be wondering is the Resurrection message has any relevance for you. Well, let me tell you right away it certainly does. Because the process of dying to self so that your old self can diminish and Christ can increase like Paul says is a life long process. In Matt 16:24 Jesus says, ["if anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.](#) **25**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.... This verse honestly is a hard saying. But if you want to be a disciple there is no other way.

Jesus explains it like this in John 12 with a parable and a principle. The parable is this **24**[Truly, truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.](#) And the principle is this John 12 verse

25Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

So let me set this straight again, while Jesus death and resurrection may be unique, Jesus expects every disciple to in some ways hate this world enough that we are constantly looking for ways to cut ties with this world. That way we let our worldliness die a 1000 deaths so that we too can paradoxically experience the fullness of life like He wants you and me to experience.

How do we let our worldliness die? Well, the answer is different for everyone. But I want to share with you my personal Lenten journey. Well, as many of you know I love things to do with science and technology. I particularly like having all the information in the world at my fingertips. So many years ago when news began to be automatically compiled and feed to you from across different news sources I jumped on it right away. It was perfect for me because I have a very broad range of interests and I am always curious about what is happening across a range of fields. As the years past though, I began noticing a problem. I was spending too much time browsing news sites. Now in itself there was nothing wrong with it. Like food. But if you consume too much food it is a problem. Now internet websites are designed to be addictive. And I began to realize that, I was getting addicted to it. I realized that I was snorting news as a fix for all kinds of things and it was taking away time that I could have been using in all kinds of ways. But the problem is that the internet was also a powerful and essential tool for my research and communication. I could not cut myself from it completely. So what was I to do? A few years ago I began to pray about it. I even installed special software to close the main news portals after 10 mins on a given day. And I was able to keep it in check, kind off. I say kind off because every now and then I would go around the checks I had put in place. This aspect of the world had me hooked and I knew I needed God's help to

let this addiction in me die. As I prayed about this this Lenten season the most amazing this happened right on Good Friday.

God finally gave me some answers as to how to deal with this problem. And it worked. The desire to browse the news just vanished. I developed a repulsion towards this force that was sucking my time away from what God wanted me to do. I knew that if something big and important happens someone will let me know. Let the news come to me when I need it. I will not go to it. This part of me that needed a constant news fix has died. And it feels great! It's like having a new life.

The message of Resurrection my friends is this. If you want to have the abundant life, you first have to be willing to undertake a death. And not just one death. Dying is a lifelong vocation for the Christ follower. But having said that, after the death but life is amazing abundance. This life that Christ wants you to have is rich, and full and eternal. It is a life like Jesus and with Jesus forever. Will you too be willing to put some aspect of your life that is still stuck in this world to death so that you too can experience the abundant Resurrection life? Let us pray.