

You Were Dead, But Now You Are Alive

Lent 4 – March 11, 2018

You were dead and now you are alive. You were lost but now you are found. You were a stranger but now you are at home. You were ill but now you are well. You were afraid but now you are filled with faith. You were abandoned but now you are embraced. You were alone but now you share beloved community. You were fallen but now you have been raised up and seated with Christ in heavenly places. All these and many more proclamations from the letters of Saint Paul tell us the very nature of God's incarnation in the world. The message of our faith and the Gospel is clear, God's mercy and love is in the world transforming our lives into works of art, of goodness, of light for divine pleasure and great earthly good!.

As spring rises from winter, so does God's grace and mercy rise in us. It has been a difficult winter. Flu epidemic, severe cold, broken femurs and hips, terminal diagnosis, nuclear arms threats, divided country, conflicted government, another mass shooting killing 17, wounding and traumatizing countless others. Life turns hard, ugly, sad. It is not hard to be gripped by darkness and discouragement. But from the hard and still frozen ground, new life emerges because of the wonder and miracle of divine life.

God is present in the world to lift us from the ashes and to restore the joy and wonder in life. The cold and barren of winter always gives way to the emergence and explosion of spring. Life wins over death. Wellness proceeds illness, light overcomes the darkness when we receive the smallest seeds of faith, and hope, and love. Give to us, O holy and divine spirit of God, the greatest gifts of all: faith, to believe what can't yet be seen; to hope: resting in what yet is unaccomplished; and love: seeing ourselves and others through the eyes of God.

My friend, Tammy Strickler was stricken with the rare Guillain-Barré Syndrome this past fall. She and her husband, Craig, were closing their jewelry store and retiring after forty years being in business in Kokomo. Two months from closing, she is paralyzed and crippled. Every time I visited her she spoke only of hope and determination to fully recover.

At the same time I have watched Joan Lacy recover from a broken hip at Halloween, Michal Ashworthe suffering a smashed femur from being struck by a car, Gary Givens being lifelined to Indianapolis while bleeding profusely following a surgery. So many others wearing the weight of seasonal illness and disorder rendering them vulnerable to both physical and emotional fatigue and illness.

What brings us back from these fallen, broken, deathly places that most, if not all of us find ourselves in life? From where does hope emerge, faith ascend, love break forth? We find our help in times of trouble from the invisible and interior places that we call God.

The psalmist writes: "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind and let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy."

Spring has begun its emergence from below the surface of soil and stem. New life which cannot be deterred. Does not the same force that brings spring forth from winter raise new faith, hope, love, and life in us? Our faith tells us it is so. Our lives and the lives around us tell us it is so. Historians and artists and authors and physicians tell us it is so. There resides in our world a mysterious and yet attainable reservoir of resurrection power that restores and raises life from the deepest and darkest and pain-filled places resulting in a myriad of testimonies proclaimed since the dawn of time... we were dead but now we are alive. We were lost but now we are home. We were sick but now we are well. We were in darkness but now we dwell in light, and love, and hope, and peace, and faith. We do not know from whence it came; but it was there for us to find.

Amen