

I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

JESUS CALLS US FROM DEATH TO LIFE

- I. By our conversion.
- II. By our resurrection.

Dear chosen, redeemed and sanctified children of God,

This morning we remember all those believers who have already fallen asleep in Christ Jesus and whose soul is now with their Savior in heaven. This includes every O.T. and N.T. believer from Adam and Eve till present day, including your own family and friends. All these believers have triumphed over sin, the devil, and their final enemy, death, through their Lord Christ Jesus. It is very fitting, then, that the name given for this day be Saints Triumphant Sunday.

You and I are also saints. We are the Saints Militant together with every other living Christian who believes in Jesus as his/her Savior from sin. We are saints, not because of anything we have done but because of what Christ has done for us. We are militant because we are still very much at war with our enemy Satan, the sinful world we live in, and our own sinful nature.

This morning I could also address you as a saint because that is what you are. That is what God has made you. You are a saint because Jesus has called you from death to life. He did this by your conversion and he will do this by the resurrection.

In our sermon text this morning Jesus says, ***"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself."***

Jesus said this in response to some Jews who denied Jesus was the Son of God and who refused to believe the miracles he performed testified to his divinity. The latest miracle that really got them fired up and ignited their anger was when Jesus had the audacity to show mercy and heal a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. I mean, how dare he sin by healing on the Sabbath, the day of rest. And then lead the man to sin by telling him to pick up his mat and go home. In response to their persistent unbelief Jesus says in v.24, ***"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."***

We are not born spiritually living people. Nobody is. When you held in your hands your son or daughter for the first time, that newborn was a gift of life from God. And perhaps in your eyes, that eight pound, green eyed, blond haired baby may have looked perfect; but in God's eyes that child was spiritually dead. From conception we are sinful and enemies of God. At birth we were little heathens in the hands of our parents; dead in sin... spiritually dead without faith. That's not very flattering and I doubt Hallmark has made any cards that say, "Congratulations it's little sinner", but that's the Bible truth.

As it was since Adam and Eve whose children were born in their image and not in the image of God, so it was for us, and so it will be for future generations. So every little baby is born with the seeds of evil inside, and rest assured those seeds of evil will sprout and grow and produce all kinds of vicious fruit just as we see in our own lives. Everyone is born spiritually dead, ***but the time has come, Jesus says, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, the gospel, and come to life.***

That's what happened for many of us at our Baptism. The gospel came to us in the washing of the water by the Word, and God put faith in Jesus into our hearts through that sacrament. We were made alive. We were raised from the dead spiritually through our conversion.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds the believers of what they once were apart from God and what they have now become in Christ. Once dead in transgression and sins, they have now been made alive with Christ. Once separated from God, now they have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Once foreigners and aliens having no part in the kingdom of God, now they have been made fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Once they were darkness, now they have been made light. Once an enemy of God, now an heir of eternal life. All of this has been done ***"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."***

We are not saved because of what we have done. We are not converted because of our great love for God and because we have chosen him. We are not Christians because at 7:43 p.m. on April 17th 1997, we made a decision to come to Christ. We are saved by grace.

It is by grace that when you die and stand before God in judgment and the gavel falls the verdict will be, "Not Guilty". By God's undeserved love the verdict now is, "Holy! Righteous! A Saint!" because the ***"blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"*** (1 John 1:7). The punishment we deserved because of our sin from birth, eternal damnation, Jesus took upon himself. Jesus suffered our hell. And because Jesus came back to life, by faith in Him we possess His life. We're no longer dead. We're alive in Jesus. We share in His victory as we pass from death to life.

Conversion is a miracle of God. The miracle in which the Holy Spirit ***"calls us by the gospel, enlightens us with his gifts, sanctifies us and keep is in the one true faith."*** Through the gospel, Jesus gives life to spiritually dead people and will continue to give this life until Judgment Day. God still has some people He has chosen in eternity to be with Him forever, and those people need to hear the gospel so they can pass from death to life. All those who are brought to life in this world by conversion to the gospel— as long as they remain Christians—will also pass from death to life at the end of time by their resurrection from the dead.

Jesus says, ***"A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear my voice."*** Jesus Himself will appear in the clouds one day and bring all dead people back to life. Death is not the end for any person in this world. All people are going to exist forever, whether they like it or not, whether they believe it or deny it. The only question is, "Where will that be?"

A day is coming when no one will ignore Jesus. On Judgment day, no one will be able to. Jesus said this as a warning to the Jews who were persecuting him and who denied him. This is a warning for those who reject Jesus today and live in persistent unbelief. Jesus will call all who have died and decayed and rejoin soul and body together. He who created the world and the universe can do this. He who paid for sin through his death and rose again from his grave can and will do this.

For Christians, that will be a wonderful day when we pass from death to life. The Bible says we'll have a glorious physical body like Jesus had when He rose from the dead. Those who trust Him will be given majestic bodies forever and will live with Him in glory. However,

those who have rejected Him will be raised and given despicable bodies that are separated from Him forever in hell.

Jesus will judge all people and his judgment will be just. Those ***“who have done good,”*** that is, those who believed in Jesus during their lifetime and naturally gave evidence of their faith as they lived their lives, who nurtured their faith by hearing God’s Word, will hear Jesus say, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”*** (Mt 25:34). But ***“those who have done evil,”*** that is, those who made it their practice to live every day without any regard to being sinful, without repenting of sin and believing in Jesus in the Savior from sin, will hear him say, ***“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”*** (Mt 25:41). Faith in Jesus leads to heaven; not believing in Jesus leads to hell.

The good works we do as Christians are not to earn salvation but are the proof God uses that we really loved Jesus and put our trust in Him alone. The more we do to praise God with our lives, the more God is glorified through us.

God has called us from death to life. He has enlightened us with His gifts so that now through faith we see the forgiveness of sins, peace, hope, joy and comfort we have through Christ. We also have His power to live God pleasing lives. When God plants faith in our hearts, He expects that faith to blossom. And that is the very nature of faith to do so. Jesus the vine didn’t say to believers, the branches, “I sure hope you bear fruit” or “you must bear fruit”. He simply said, “You will bear fruit” and even added the word “much”.

What opportunities then has God given us today to put our faith into action? For one, we have the opportunity to gather around God’s Word and listen to what He has to say to us today. We do this not because we have to but because we know the importance of God’s Word in our lives. Apart from His Word we would not have life and it is through this Word that we are empowered to live godly lives. We demonstrate our fruits of faith when we pray to God. As we come before God boldly and confidently trusting that He will hear the prayers of the righteous, that is, those who are righteous through Christ. We demonstrate our fruits of faith when we come before the cross laying ALL our cares and worries at the feet of Jesus and when we take God at His Word trusting that in Him we have forgiveness and will have rest.

So dear friends, keep listening to the voice of Jesus in his Word and in the Sacraments. You are forgiven; heaven is in your future. One day you will hear the voice of Jesus inviting you into heaven. We are the church militant, but soon we’ll be the church triumphant. We’ve passed from death to life through our conversion, and we will pass from death to life at the resurrection. Amen.