

November 6, 2011
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 2:1-10

What are we going to do?

Our reading this morning comes from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus.

Whenever you are I read something like we will read this morning – something that is rich in thought and challenging to our minds – what our minds normally do – (after we reboot them once they first shut down) – is look for repetitive words that might give us an idea about important themes – we shake them through the sifter of questions that we have brought with us to the reading to see what we find in the bottom once we have gotten rid of the chaff – we divide things up – place things in categories - sorting by subject.

(You're thinking about this time – no – no – really what I do is normally just take a nap.)

If there are themes that we might look for in Ephesians in general and in particular to our passage – they might be that Paul wants us to know --- with both our hearts and our heads:

- The hope we have in Christ.
- The riches and richness of the risen Christ that is at our disposal.
- The greatness of God's power

Prayer
Reading

“You were dead – through the transgression and the sins – in which you once lived.” Or as Eugene Peterson says in *The Message* – *‘It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin.’*

“But God – who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...”

To follow Christ Jesus – to be his disciples - is to be transformed – to be changed. Paul says that we were dead – but now we are alive.

These words from Paul is a great passage for us today with Halloween still fresh in our memories – *‘you were dead – through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived.’* Sounds like the ‘night of the living dead’ – doesn’t it – we are dead but alive - Zombies – mindless bodies – without souls – driven by some unknown need.

There are many ways we live as those who are dead.

We are sometimes dead to beauty – it passes us right by – in the rising of the sun – in the flower on a desk – in the grand display of nature – in the simple beauty of colors coming together on a canvas – or notes coming together in a song. We pass it right by – afraid that we will miss something ultimately more important.

We are sometimes dead to kindness – afraid of what someone might want in return. “Did you see the way that man smiled at me – I wonder what he is up to.”

We are sometimes dead to compassion – afraid of what it might require from us – afraid it might ask us of our time – of a listening ear – afraid that it might require some response on our part.

We are dead to love – unable to receive it when it is offered – afraid of what it might demand from us – afraid of what might cost us when we are vulnerable to another – afraid that our heart might be broken.

We are dead to sharing what we have with others – afraid we will not have enough for ourselves. Did you ever see children with the big bag of candy they collect at Halloween – spreading it out on the floor to count it all out – or to separate the liked from the disliked – holding tightly to that candy that is the best – afraid that someone else will eat it or that there will never be anymore.

You can see the deadness in one's life – it looks like arrogance – or cynicism – it looks like rightness – as in I am right and you are wrong – it looks like selfishness – and it trusts nothing and no one.

To follow Christ Jesus – to be his disciples - is to be transformed – to be changed.

“You were dead – through the transgression and the sins – in which you once lived.”

“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our own trespasses – made us alive ...”

There are many ways that we live as those who are alive.

We live as those who are alive – to the gift that each day is – an opportunity to experience the beauty – the wonder – the mystery that is life – an opportunity to learn – to grow – to give ourselves to others.

We live as those who are alive – when we risk ourselves – in kindness – compassion – love – when we allow ourselves to become vulnerable with others.

We live as those who are alive – when we can place fear and anxiousness in its proper place – a place that no longer controls our thoughts and actions.

We live as those who are alive – when we are humble – when we listen before speaking – when we search for truth – when we persevere – when we live with hope – when we exhibit the goodness that God created in us.

To follow Christ Jesus – to be his disciples - is to be transformed – to be changed.

Giving – giving generously – changes us.

It is true – isn't it? When we are able to give – give in a way in which we don't expect anything back – or can't expect anything back – then we are changed. We become more aware of the needs of others – we are willing to risk something significant to ourselves – our hearts become softer – and we are changed.

Grace – defines God's generosity toward us – doesn't it? Grace is the unearned – undeserved – unmerited – favor of God. Grace is extravagant. It is a gift that cannot be repaid in kind. Grace is found in God's acts of creation and provision. Grace is God's love, mercy, and forgiveness all rolled together – packaged in a beautifully wrapped box – and given to us in Jesus Christ.

Grace – defines God's generosity toward us. Paul tells us this morning that God – who is rich in mercy – great in love – shares with us the immeasurable riches of his grace – so that we might be alive – not living although dead – but alive – alive to God's goodness – alive to share that goodness.

Giving changes us.

Donna and I were married in February of 1989. When we got married I brought a lot of debt into our relationship. I was paying child support and alimony. I was paying for a house that I was not living in. I was paying lawyer fees. I was paying hospital bills from the premature birth of Martha in 1985. I was paying credit card debt that had accumulated during the time of my separation and divorce from my first wife. And I was basically out of work. Needless to say –

there was a deadness – that sucked the life out of the two of us because of the financial situation I brought to our marriage. I can't find any evidence of our giving to any kind of charitable organization that year.

By the end of 1992 our three kids (from my first marriage) were living with us. We had bought a home. We had paid off most of the debts. In 1992 Donna and I made, before taxes, \$57,000. That year we were able to give \$4,100 or about 80.00 a week to both the building fund and general fund of the church. This represented about 7.2% of our pre-tax income.

By 1996 I had changed jobs – and was now working for Southminster Presbyterian Church. Two of the three kids were in high school. That year we made \$52,000.00 before taxes. (remember I said I went to work at the church). That year we were able to give 3,500.00 to the church now our giving was down to about 70.00 per week. This represented about 6.7% of our per tax income.

In 2000 I am in seminary in Dubuque. Our two older children are basically out on their own – for the moment for one of them – and our youngest is in high school. Donna is working and I am working on reading, and studying, and writing papers. – In 2000 together – Donna and I made \$30,000.00 before taxes. (It was almost a \$35,000 drop in income from 1999.)– That year we gave \$1,800 to our church in St Louis or about 35.00 per week. This represented about 6% of our pre-tax income.

Now our children are gone – and we are here in Cedar Rapids. - This year Donna and I will make about \$80,000. We will pay about \$15,000 in taxes leaving us with about \$65,000. Of that we will give \$6,000.00 to the general fund here at Echo Hill. We will contribute about 2,500.00 to the building fund and contribute about 1,000.00 to some charities like Camp Wyoming, World Vision, the Lymphoma and Leukemia Association and American Heart Society. – This year we will give about 12.5 of our pretax income away – which we are glad to do.

If fact the more that we are able to give – the more we want to give. We have been and we are being changed – which is the risk you will have to take if you are going to follow Jesus – and all risks are uncomfortable. But Jesus is the Lord of life – who is rooting out the deadness that lies inside of us – and by the power of the Holy Spirit – breathing new life into those places of our lives.

So – what are we going to do?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.