

Looking for life...in a cemetery?

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OCMC

In 4 more weeks, I'll be starting my sabbatical and Vandy, Bethannie and I have been making our plans for the next 4 months. One of the things we want to do is be able to enjoy sitting on our front deck in the summer, using the grill, reading, sitting in the swing. But we needed an umbrella for our table out there so for the past few weeks I've been looking at the Sunday circulars for a good deal on an umbrella and I found one this past week at Target. So Vandy and I went to Target on Thurs. and got an umbrella. Another thing we're going to do is, while Bethannie is in Ohio with the youth group, Vandy and I are going to leave the country. So we need new passports. We went by the post office last week to turn in our applications but it was after hours so we're going tomorrow to do that. And then another thing we want to do is paint our house. We're planning that for near the end of the summer after most of the heat is gone. So one thing I'll need to do in June is go to Home Depot or Lowes and start looking at paint chips and pick out colors and start pricing what we'll need to prep the walls and so forth.

Now I'm telling you all this because it does have something to do with the women going to the tomb on Easter morning. You see, when I wanted to buy an umbrella for my deck, I didn't go to the Post Office. And when I wanted to turn in my passport application, I didn't go to Target. And when I want to look at paint chips for house paint, I'm not going to JoAnne's Fabrics and Crafts. We know we have to go to certain places to get certain things. The women in Luke 24 went to a tomb because they were looking for a dead body. They were not looking for a living one. If they were looking for the living Jesus, they wouldn't have expected him to be in the tomb because we all know only dead people are in tombs. But when they got to the tomb, they didn't find a dead body as expected. Instead 2 men with dazzling clothes appeared and said to them "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here..."

I actually got the outline for this sermon on Easter Sunday. Janelle and Kai Tinsley read this scripture and this question really stood out to me. Why do

we seek the Living One among the dead? This is a profound question for us today. All of us seek for life and there are certain things that are necessary for physical life such as food, water, clothing, and shelter. But there are other things that add quality to life such as meaningful relationships, meaningful work, art, music, education, hobbies, travel, and the list can go on. We want purpose and meaning in our lives. We want to love and be loved. We want to be respected and treated with dignity. We want laughter, pleasure, time for relaxation. We want challenges and achievement. And all of these things are good. There is nothing wrong with having any of these things in our lives. The question is, are we seeking these things among the dead?

In Psalm 36:7-9, it says "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; and You give them to drink of the river of Your delights. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light, we see light." The psalmist knows that the Lord is the fountain of life. It is in Him that all the things of life are found. Yet many people approach Christianity with the attitude that they will only find death there. Many people expect that religion today, including Christianity, has no relevance to modern life. It's outdated, stale, irrelevant, boring, only good for producing guilt, and just plain wrong. Some people expect if they come to church they will find a dead Jesus. But the reality is that the tomb is empty. He has risen and is alive and true life is found only in him.

But many people don't believe that. They think what they need for life cannot be found in Christianity so they seek life elsewhere not realizing they are seeking life among the dead. We think if we're in the right relationship we'll have life so we go from one sexual encounter to another to another. We think if we have great success at work we'll have life so we work 80 hours a week and never have time to enjoy our families. We think if we have the best professional reputation we'll have life so we do whatever it takes to get ahead, regardless of how many people we run over to get to the top. Think of Bernie Madoff, and others like him, who have thought life was in making more and more money and

ended up causing distress in so many lives. We think we can find life in a bottle or a pill or a needle but that only leads to death quicker. We think if we have more things we'll have life so we buy bigger and better everything and end up enslaved to debt. Someone who's been in the news the last several months is the octomom, Nayda Suleman. She is a single mom with 14 children including 2 year old twins, a 4 year old autistic child, and 8 - 3 month old infants. In interviews she has stated that she wanted a big family because she was deprived of one as a child. She's looking for something that she thinks is missing in her life and she thinks she's going to find it in all these children. But at what cost?

We look for life in the wrong places. In Luke 12:15 Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Instead in John 17:3 he said "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." It is only in the Living One that we will find life but the Living One is not among the dead.

In Luke 10:38ff we find the story of Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him teach, but Martha was bustling around the house putting dinner together. When Martha complained to Jesus, he told her "You are worried and upset about many things; but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her." Mary looked to Jesus for life. She chose to spend time with him rather than rush around fixing dinner and Jesus said she had chosen what is better.

In John 6, near the end of the chapter, Jesus begins to teach his disciples and followers that he is the living bread that comes down from heaven and whoever eats of him will live forever, meaning that his life has to infuse our lives. He has to become part of us. Many of his disciples say "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" And many of them stopped following him. In verse 67 Jesus said to the Twelve, "You do not want to leave me too, do you?" And Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." It is in Jesus, the Living

One, that true and eternal life is found, and no where else. When we seek life among the dead, we will find death. But when we seek life in Jesus, the Living One, we will find true love, acceptance, significance, purpose, meaning, joy, and fulfillment that lasts.

Jesus came to give us life. But even before Jesus came, God set before His people the choice of life or death. In Deuteronomy 30, God spoke to Israel as they were about to enter the promised land. He said to them (vs. 15-20 read, p. 190). The Lord is our life. It is when we remain in relationship with him that we have life. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In John 10:10 he said, "I have come that they (meaning us) may have life, and have it to the full." Jesus died and rose again not so we could just exist but so that we could have a full and wonderful life. Why do we try to find life anywhere else but in him?

Paul writes in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." If we keep on looking for life among the dead, the result will be continued death. But if we look for life in Christ, we find eternal life, lasting life, a life of quality that does not end.

So what does all this mean for the situations we find ourselves in right now? You might be saying, "Well Pastor Lynn, that sounds great. But I've still got problems in my family, I still fight with my spouse, I'm still worried about whether I'll have a job next month, I'm still in debt more than I can handle, I've still got this physical problem, I'm still worried about my kids. Where's the life?" Let's go back to Luke 23 to the end of the chapter. Jesus died on the cross and his body was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The women followed Joseph to the tomb and witnessed the burial of Jesus. Then they went home to prepare spices and perfumes so they could anoint Jesus' body. But at the end of verse 56 it says "They rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment." These women followed Jesus past the cross all the way to the grave. They left his dead body there and went home and then rested. Why? Because they were being obedient to God's commandments. They were being faithful to the relationship they had as God's people. Even though they are going

through the worst crisis of their lives, they remain faithful to the relationship with God. There comes times in our lives when we feel like we've followed Jesus all the way to the grave. We've prayed, we've fasted, we've quoted scripture, we've had others pray, and still there seems to be no resolution to the situation we're in. When we've come this far, the only thing we can do is rest and remain faithful to the relationship we have with God. We sometimes have to let the thing lie in the grave a while and just rest.

When my dad was dying of brain cancer, one thing my family and I found helpful was the information we received about the process of dying from hospice services. You see our instinct when someone is sick is to do what we can to alleviate suffering and sustain life. But when someone is dying, trying to sustain life causes more pain. We want the person to eat and drink, but there comes a time when they physically can no longer do that because the body systems are actively dying. So when the person is actively dying we have to recognize that we need to stop trying to sustain life. We have to rest and let them die.

Sometimes in the hard situations of our lives, we have to recognize when it's time to stop our efforts at fixing things and just rest. In the Sabbath rest, we are reminded that only God can do God's work and as we rest, God does His work. It was at the end of the Sabbath that Jesus came out of the tomb. We have hope that God will work in all our circumstances because of the fact that Jesus came out of the tomb alive and kicking and has promised that we will do the same.

Remember the story of Lazarus in John 11. Jesus received word his friend Lazarus was sick and Jesus was urgently needed. But Jesus waited and let his friend die and lie in the grave for 4 days. Then when he finally came, he had the audacity to say to Lazarus' sister Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Then he proceeded to command Lazarus to come out of the grave and he came out alive and well. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We can rest and let things lie because Jesus has promised us life and he does not go back on his promises.

When we seek life in the Resurrected One, we find resurrection life. Paul writes in Romans 8:10-11 “But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” We can also say that if the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead lives in us, He will bring life to the hopeless situations we face. That life may look different than we are expecting, but God will bring life. Some dreams and hopes may have to die, but God will bring others ones to life, and we will be fulfilled in what He gives us.

Because Jesus came out of the tomb, because he is the Living One, we have hope for even the most hopeless of situations. God can and will work miracles in places of death. We all have places in our lives that feel like death. There are situations that seem hopeless, dreams that we think will never become reality, prayers that we think will never be answered, relationships that we think will never be healthy. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it to the full. He will work in hopeless situations and he will bring resurrection life to them. Are we seeking for Him? Are we expecting the Living One to come into places of death in our lives?

The disciples weren't expecting Jesus to come among them even after he rose from the dead, but he did. The 2 on the road to Emmaus didn't expect Jesus to come walking up to them and they didn't recognize him when he did. But that didn't stop Jesus from walking with them, talking with them, going to their house and breaking bread with them. The disciples locked themselves in a room because they were afraid of being arrested themselves, but that didn't stop Jesus from appearing among them and eating with them. The great apostle Paul who wrote so much of the New Testament and worked to spread the gospel throughout the Middle East and Europe, was busy arresting and killing Christians in Acts chapter 9. He didn't expect to run into the living Jesus, and probably no Christians expected Jesus to appear to him, but that's what happened and it turned his life completely around.

You see, the resurrection makes all the difference. Life has come into the place of death. Jesus came back to life in a tomb. And then he walked out of it. And now that same resurrection life is in us. We can say the same thing Paul did in Romans 8:31ff “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” God will bring life into hopeless situations even if it seems it is taking a long time for him to do so. But we have to also take hold of this life God gives. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 6:11-12, “But you, child of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” In other words, be consistent in living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Keep doing good, keep believing, keep praying, keep communicating with Jesus, keep submitting every part of our lives to the Lordship of Jesus, keep obeying God, keep doing what He tells us to do in His word, keep being filled with the Spirit of God. As we continue in these things, the resurrection life of Jesus Christ flows through us into every situation we face, to bring hope, and healing, and renewal.

It all starts with Jesus. It starts with believing that he is the Christ the Son of the Living God and that he wants to have a real relationship with us. We can have that relationship with the Living One by asking him to forgive us of all the things we’ve done wrong and to make us his children, and fill us with His Spirit. It is the Spirit of the Living God in us who teaches us about God and how to live as His children. This is the post-resurrection reality. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. If we want life, we have to find it in the Son of God, not among the dead.