

## **Ephesians 2:1-10**

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 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—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

### **Sin-Dead, Resurrection-Alive**

Chapter 2 of Ephesians is an abrupt transition into resurrection-living. In a few sentences, Paul brings us from standing on the border of this resurrection country to standing in the midst of the resurrection forrest, surrounded by resurrection people. But this Resurrection-life, practicing resurrection, might not look like what you think it does. It involves something Eugene Peterson calls “acquired passivity.” Now, if we are honest, the word “passivity”, or “passive,” gets a bad wrap in

North American culture. We are a land of pull yourself up by the bootstraps, go to work, succeed, be the best that you can be, and all that jazz. My MeeMa used to tell my mom and uncle, and later my sister and I, one of her favorite sayings: "Don't just be *like* the Jones's. You *be* the Jones's." The idea that the American Dream is attainable through hard work and grit and determination is completely antithetical to the concept of "acquired passivity." Peterson writes:

It is not what we do; it is what we participate in. But we cannot participate apart from a willed passivity, entering into and giving ourselves up to what is previous to us, the presence and action of God in Christ that is other than us. Such passivity does not come easy to us. It must be acquired.

Now, before you think that Peterson or I are suggesting that we just kind of sit back and let the world pass us by, that's not exactly what he's talking about here. Acquired passivity does not reject the work of the individual, but rather requires a nuanced understanding in which all human work is preceded by God's work. In chapter 2, Paul writes that God *has already made* us alive in Christ, and by his *grace* we have been saved. Again, it goes back to what we discussed last week: We start with God, not ourselves.

Think back to the time Jesus went to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to eat with them. Martha was the hostess with the mostest, doing all of the cooking, cleaning, and preparing, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. That, I think, is a perfect image of acquired passivity. Jesus doesn't negate that work is important, but the *most* important part of growing up in

Christ is being aware and present to God at work in our lives.

When we get wrapped up in our sin-dead lives, the never-ending rat race, we miss an opportunity to grow up in Christ. When we are on the hamster wheel of life, never stopping to experience God's presence, we miss an opportunity to live a resurrection life. When chores prevent us from showing love to one another, we fail to practice resurrection.

Peterson writes that "Faith in Christ is a plunge into grace. Grace: 'not your own doing; it is a gift of God.'" That sentence is not passive at all in the sense that we understand the word, rather, it is an active participation on our parts to practice resurrection. As we grow up in Christ, we learn how to plunge ourselves into the grace that is given to us by God. And this leads us to live what Paul says is a life of good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. The late congressman John Lewis is known for coining the phrase "Good trouble." I think that is another way of saying what Paul is saying to the Ephesians, and to us: Our faith plunges us into this way of life that God has created for us, called us into, so that we can do good work in the world. Our sin-dead selves become alive in our resurrected-selves through Jesus Christ, and we go into this world, serving and leading, and practicing resurrection. I want to do that, and I hope you do too. There are all kinds of ways we can live into this life, friends—serving at Dot's Kitchen or OUM, attending city council meetings and prayer groups, and even finding ways to make a difference right here at Westminster Presbyterian. So let's practice

resurrection together, and shine the light of hope that we have been given. Amen.