

Isn't this a great day? It's good to be alive. That's what Easter is about - life. Life is good. Even when life is bad, it's better than the alternative. Everyone celebrates new life this time of year, even the non-religious. Last Sunday was the first day of spring, the first season of the new year when the days get longer, the birds sing louder and new life begins to appear. We all seek life. We cherish it and we hold onto it as long as we possibly can. That's why one of the worst things we can ever hear is, "You have a life-threatening illness with no possible cure and you don't have very long to live." That's what my friend, Barry Anino, heard last week.

Barry and I have been getting together pretty regularly over the past couple of years and he has always been honest that although his wife Debra and daughter Lena are Jesus followers, that's just not been his thing. He pointed out that there are so many religions out there, how can you say yours is the right one. But Barry agreed to study the Gospel of Mark with me and a handful of other men. Now Barry has liver cancer, aggressive liver cancer. As we met in his hospital room last week I couldn't think of any better antidote for such grim news than the Good News of Easter. **God's power, demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus, is able to raise you up to experience a new way of life both now and forever.** That's an important message, not just for Barry because I have a bulletin for you, "You have a life-threatening illness, with no possible cure and you don't have very long to live." So I hope you will give God a hearing today.

I want to read part of a letter preserved in the NT written to a group of people who were confused by so many "hollow and deceptive" philosophies in their city. The Jews told them the only way to defeat death was to keep the Law. The Gnostics told them life could be found through hidden knowledge. Those were just two of many variations of religious philosophies expressed in Colossae, but they all led to the same conclusion: there is more to salvation than what Jesus Christ has to offer. Paul reminds them of God's resurrection power in Colossians 2:13-15...He wants them to know three things that I want you to know today:

God's resurrection power provides a new way of seeing. The Bible explains the reason for all of the chaos we witness on this planet. *"You were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self."* 13a. Apart from Christ we are all dead men walking, "walkers" living in Zombieland, alive on the outside but dead on the inside. We were dead for two reasons - our transgressions or sins and "the power of your sinful self," ("the uncircumcision of our flesh"). In other words, we were born sinners. Sin is a genetic condition. Sin is not doing bad things. It is much deeper than that. This

fatal disease cannot be cured with a topical ointment like a skin rash. It is a blood disease that has no cure and it will result in our death. We inherited the rebellious nature of our ancestors, Adam and Eve. Apart from Christ, we have two fatal flaws: a sin nature resulting that leads to chronic sinfulness. We aren't sinners because we sin; we sin because by nature we are sinners.

According to the Bible, "the wages of sin is death." Death in the Bible means separation, not cessation. When Adam and Eve sinned, they died immediately, instantly separated from God. As a result, their bodies became subject to the process of illness and aging that ultimately leads to physical death. When a person dies physically, his soul is separated from his body. To be spiritually dead means to be separated from the living God, the author and giver of all life. If we die physically while we are still spiritually dead, we will be eternally separated from God, under His wrath, the most horrible existence imaginable. But Easter offers us reason to hope.

God's resurrection power provides a new way of feeling. Because God raised Jesus from the dead I can have hope. Why? *"He canceled the debt, which listed all the rules we failed to follow. He took away that record with its rules and nailed it to the cross."* 2:14. All of us have a record, a record of sins ("debts"). But I will be raised from the dead because God loves me so much that He paid off my debts.

There is a famous story about a man who was on a NJ turnpike when he noticed a limo on the side of the road with a flat tire. He pulled the car over and helped fix the flat. The darkly tinted window rolled down and there was Donald Trump in the back seat. He thanked the man and asked him how he could repay him for his kindness. The man suggested sending his wife a bouquet of flowers and handed him his card. Trump agreed. When the flowers arrived a few days later, there was a note included that said, "By the way, I paid off your mortgage."

There is a lot of debate as to the veracity of that story. Trump said it happened so there you go! I so want it to be true. The thought that a wealthy man would pay off my house just to repay a simple act of kindness is such an inspiring thought. But I've got an even better story. The owner of the universe paid your debt. And it wasn't because of anything you did for Him. It is simply because of His great love for you. And that story is true! There is one last thing I want you to know...

God's resurrection power provides a new way of living. We can understand why we need a Savior. We can even have hope that Jesus will save us. But we can still

live in fear. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ sets us free from fear; fears within and fears without. The source of these fears is exposed in v. 15.

"God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless." 2:15. The ESV says, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

"The rulers and authorities" (this expression is used 6x in the NT) refer to the vast army of evil and malicious spirits who make war against the people of God. There are principalities and powers, soldiers of Satan, that wield power in the unseen realm and oppose everything and everyone that is of God. There is an invisible war raging all around us. Like it or not, you have been thrust into that battle. (We begin a **new sermon series** next Sunday about this invisible war...)

These powers were created by God. They are therefore under His ultimate control. Never forget, the devil is God's devil. Jesus went to the cross to take back what had been surrendered in the fall. But Satan fights to retain control by constantly reminding us of our sin. At the cross, Jesus subdued these evil forces and disarmed them. When Jesus was nailed to the cross so were the written charges against us. Your debt has been paid in full and the record of our wrongdoing has been nailed with Christ to the cross. Since we have been declared "not guilty" by the Judge of the Universe these principalities and powers have been disarmed. "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Paul uses a powerful image to drive this truth home. In v. 15 in the ESV says, *"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."* In the Roman world a triumph was a parade celebrating a victory by the Roman army. After a victory, the Roman general led his army through the streets of Rome as a crowd of citizens cheered and threw flowers on the ground. The general, adorned with a purple robe and a laurel wreath on his head, rode into Rome on a two-wheeled chariot pulled by four horses. His soldiers followed waving trinkets, jewelry, and other spoils of war which they took from the enemy. Prisoners followed the procession in chains, symbolizing that while Rome enjoyed peace and freedom those who dared challenge the authority of the Emperor lost not only their lives but their dignity. The whole procession filled the streets of Rome with celebration, dancers, singers, soldiers in triumph, and the emperor himself in the glory of Roman victory.

Paul transfers this imagery onto Christ. The triumph of Christ is greater than any Roman triumph. Christ has defeated the enemy and taken captive Satan himself. Easter is the celebration of Christ's triumphant victory over an evil enemy.

God's power, demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus, can set you free and raise you up to experience a new way of life both now and forever. The good news of Easter isn't just a life insurance policy to be cashed in when you die in the future. It changes the way we see and feel and live in the present. We can make every decision in light of eternity. That is why Paul tells the Colossians:

Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.² Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth.³ Your old sinful self has died, and your new life is kept with Christ in God.⁴ Christ is your life, and when he comes again, you will share in his glory." 3:1-4

When I visited Barry in the hospital he said, "I need to make things right with God." And right there on the fourth floor of Presbyterian hospital, he did. He accepted the free gift of eternal life that Jesus offers. He offered up His weakness and God revealed His strength.

"When really weak in ourselves, and conscious of that weakness, we are in the state suited to the manifestation of the power of God. When emptied of ourselves we are filled with God. Those who think they can change their own hearts, atone for their own sins, subdue the power of evil in their own souls or in the souls of others, who feel able to sustain themselves under affliction, God leaves to their own resources. But when they feel and acknowledge their weakness He communicates to them divine strength." *Charles Hodge*

Barry Anino is a new man today. "Old things have passed away and new things have come." He sees life differently, feels life differently and live differently today. There is no greater joy than to see the change in someone who has crossed over from death to life. His body may fail him but His spirit will be raised to newness of life. Of course his greatest concern is for his wife and daughter. I believe the greatest gift we could give our loved ones is the assurance of knowing how to find us when this life is over.

Mr. Massey...Make sure that when that inevitable day comes that your family knows how to find you.

Lord God, the resurrection of Jesus
has given us new life and renewed hope.
Help us to live as new people with new priorities
in pursuit of a new purpose for our lives.
Give us the wisdom to know what we must do,
the will to want to do it,
the courage to attempt it,
the perseverance to continue in it,
and the strength to complete it.

Lord we believe in the resurrection because we believe in You. Help Thou our
unbelief as we leave here today to walk in newness of life.