

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2023

Genesis 50:15-21

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

The Lord kills and He makes alive (Deuteronomy 32:39). The Lord wounds and He binds up (Job 5:18). Repentant Israel cried out in faith: “Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence” (Hosea 6:1-2).

On the Last Day, The Lord God Almighty will call all of humanity from their graves. Those who are covered by the blood of Christ will enter His eternal kingdom. Those who have despised Christ and His forgiveness in this life, those who are without faith will enter eternal torment, eternal death, eternal darkness. That is a fact. You are navigating this world now. You either embrace the forgiveness won for you by Christ’s sacrifice or you grow lukewarm, apathetic toward God’s remarkable gifts, and imperil your eternal destiny. Death and resurrection; that is the way of life, that is the way of grace, that is the way of faith. There is something in you that must be put to death. Jesus tells a parable that is remarkably vivid. The parable is about you. If you attempt to make this parable about someone other than you, then you are hindering God’s intent to kill and make alive. The parable is no theoretical abstraction. This parable of the wicked servant is not a distant theological principle – it is us.

Our sinful nature, yours and mine, does not want to forgive. Our pride wants to limit those who receive our grace, our mercy. “Seven times?”, Peter asks. How far must I go? It shows his smallness of faith and understanding, our smallness of faith, our smallness of understanding. The wicked servant in the parable kept the King’s mercy, given to him, separate from his life with his neighbor, separate from his life with his fellow servant. Have you seen un-forgiveness in your heart? God has; and He wants to eliminate it. Death and resurrection; “the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Small Catechism). This amazing parable is intended to wake you up and drive you to your knees. This amazing parable is designed to create in you a penitent heart. The wicked slave is me. He is you.

You and I were hopelessly indebted. Mercy wiped out the radical red in our ledger. Blood; Christ’s blood forgave us everything. Everything! We’ve been liberated from the prison of our sin, liberated from the guilt of our transgression. He took it. He paid it. He ransomed us by His suffering and death. An impossible sum that you could never remit; that is what you racked up before Holy God, and Jesus, hanging on a cross, wiped it out. You are beautifully innocent. His work entirely – a free gift for you. And we hold our forgiveness hostage. We judge those who sin against us with a vindictive sneer. Jesus wants you to see it. Jesus wants to bring you to repentance. He kills and He makes alive.

That’s what you saw today, death and resurrection. That’s exactly how the Bible describes baptism. Beautiful John Loren Scott, he has a sinful nature and God brought to bear on that

beautiful baby the Lord's death and the Lord's resurrection. "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, behold the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That's baptismal language. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). That's baptismal language. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:5-6). That's what you witnessed. That's what we celebrate.

Christians celebrate death and resurrection – celebrate it, lift it up, honor it and praise it and luxuriate in it. You forgiving someone is acknowledging that Christ's death and resurrection governs your life. You forgiving someone freely is joyfully bearing witness to the fact that Christ's death and resurrection has set you free from sin and death and hell. You forgiving someone is precisely how Christians are to be known in this world – death and resurrection sets us apart. The glory of Almighty God is embedded in the act of you forgiving someone who has sinned against you. This Divine Service is a celebration of death and resurrection. The sacrament of the altar is a celebration of the Son of God who died and rose again and forgives us today. The Lord kills and He makes alive. It is only the dead that He raises. His love is alive in the bitter word of the law that creates penitent hearts, convicting us of our sin. His love is alive in the word of absolution, the word that lifts us from the ash heap and seats us with princes (1 Samuel 2:6-8). By death and resurrection, He transforms our lowly, unforgiving hearts so that we become like Him. Death and resurrection; it is all around you. By God's grace, it is in you. This is most certainly true.