

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Apr 22nd 2015

The Psalm of praise for the tremendous deeds of God in the Old Testament, along with the powerful Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, and the amazing invitation to eternal life by Jesus recorded in the book of John encourages me to raise my expectations. I believe all these words are true, and so I believe wonderful things are possible with my life. Today! I don't believe that eternal life is only granted to us after we die and go to a better place. If we only celebrate the risen Lord on Easter Sunday and only hold hope for our own resurrection from death, I am pretty sure we are setting our expectations too low. I believe Jesus is not only alive every day, but he raises us up daily also, to raise our expectations.

Jesus came to forgive our sins, not just undo death. They are both part of the same package and that gift can come to us every day. But there is an even high expectation. The resurrection is not just about death having no power over us at the end of our lives, it is about sin having no power over us in the midst of our lives. It isn't just about the forgiveness of our sins so we are not burdened by them. It is like having someone pay off our mortgages while we are still working, not after we die, or even just before we retire so we can sit there self-righteously burden free. For us, confession of our sins is like asking God to pay off the mortgage we'll never be able to pay long before we retire, knowing that we will get ourselves into debt again. That takes a lot of nerve, or actually faith, but I really believe that if we confess our sins, God forgives them. More than that, I believe through Jesus and his innocent suffering, death, and resurrection, God's forgiveness gives us a fresh start to do something worthwhile with our lives. Mine and everybody else's too. That is a high expectation!

Jesus came to pay the mortgage on our debts of sin, but it is not just to clear our names at the bank. We are not just debt free; our credit rating actually goes up too! And if we live in the resurrection, every day is like pay day. We can live more fully with the gifts of life we are given. We can keep co-creating with God. We can keep all the glorious deeds going. We can work powerful acts. And yet, even as we try to become better stewards of our lives, we will end up back in debt. We will come up short. We will continue to sin.

So there is a caution here with raising our expectations. Paying off our debts is not about winning the lottery. Studies reveal that most people who win the lottery do not change their lives. They spend their winnings the same way they did before, only a lot faster. Most don't even pay off their debts. Jesus is not the winning lottery ticket. Jesus did not come to just make us better, healthier, or wealthier people. He didn't come to just make improvements in the way we live. We can't stop sinning, but Jesus came to save us from this self-destructive human condition. The only debt he takes away is our sins. But that is the big one. That is the pay off that makes us entirely new people....free to live in the resurrection as an ongoing process of renewal. It is re-creation every day!

Our preparation for Easter is about ending the lives that were over-drawn and bankrupted so that we too can experience the resurrection as a new lease on life. Letting our old selves die is what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Hopefully, we who are people of faith are all at work rolling away the stones in front of our own tombs as we continue to celebrate the risen Lord in our own lives. I am so grateful to God that Easter raises our expectations for what we can do with our lives.

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