

June 13, 2004

Pentecost 2 C

There is the story in a Norwegian play of the man who went to visit patients in a mental hospital.

As he went from person to person he was struck by how clear-thinking many of the patients seemed.

So he went to the doctor who was the administrator of the hospital.
He told him how surprised he was at how normal the patients seemed to be.

He said, *“These patients discuss their plans with such precision and concern.
They must be sane.”*

The doctor said,
*“Oh, I assure you...they are all quite mad.
They talk very sensibly but if you
notice....
they only talk about themselves.*

*They are, in fact, intelligently obsessed with themselves.
It is SELF...morning, noon and night.*

*They can't get away from it...they lug it around with them 24 hrs a day...
their SELF.”*

These people are in bondage.

Have you ever thought of being in bondage to your SELF?

Psychologists tell us that obsession with self is the root of many forms of mental illness.

Yet we are all focused on ourselves to some extent.

In fact, the world and our culture tells
us that focus on ourselves is a good
thing.

Go for the gusto!
It's all about ME!
Look out for Number 1

It is much easier to see this in others than it is in ourselves.

I mean, think of the conversations you have with people.
How much of it is people talking about
themselves.

So, I guess the world's message is that a good, healthy portion of self-centeredness is fine....
just don't let it go overboard.

And then we come to this letter from Paul today written to the church in Galacia...

This church he planted in Asia Minor.

They were Gentiles...pagans. They had probably worshipped a collection of Greek gods...
And Paul had gone there with the
message of Jesus and they accepted it.

But now something had happened and Paul had gotten word of it.
He wasn't able to travel back to Galacia right at that time...
so he sent a letter by messenger.
A letter that would have been
read aloud at a Sunday service of
worship.

Paul wrote....

*"I have been crucified with Christ;
it is no longer I who live, but Christ
lives in me;
and the life which I now live in the
flesh...
I live by faith in the Son of
God, who loved me and gave
Himself for me. "*

It states the case of the cross as being an agent of change in the life of the Christian.

The mere reading of this verse ought to cause us to lift our heads and hearts to heaven in praise.

For without the cross and the crucifixion we are in a world of hurt.

This verse is more than a theologically sound, good statement that gets my hand stamped for entrance into heaven.

No this verse speaks the truth of the cross and its direct and intentional work in our lives.

And that is ... to impale and impact our lives at that blessed event called Calvary, but also today, this day!

You see the cross and its message is to pierce (impale) our hearts as well as forcibly change (impact) the way we live.

Paul says... *"I Have Been Crucified with
Christ."*

This agent of change...the cross... impaled and impacted the apostle Paul to the point he was able to say...
"I have been crucified."

It's an interesting statement isn't it?

He says that HE...has been crucified with Christ on the cross.

What does he mean????

Paul is speaking of his total being ...

his hopes, dreams, aspirations,
failures, background, position and
power.

And notice...Paul was not speaking in the past tense as something done and over.

He didn't say He WAS crucified with Christ...but rather HAS BEEN crucified with Christ...
meaning a past action that continues
to have results in his life today.

In other words, Paul was saying he could not get over the impact of the cross in his life.
It was still impacting and impaling his life as he penned these words for you and I to read.

Paul shares with us these continuing results from the cross as that agent of change.

Paul says, "*I No Longer Live*" ...

Isn't this an interesting statement in light of what we are taught today by our culture?

Isn't the world we live in a lot like that mental hospital?

It seems sane enough until we realize that it is obsessed with itself.

All the world talks about is its feelings...
it's politics...it's wars, it's economy.

The largest part of existence, God, is unmentioned.

Persons who become absorbed in this conversation,
who let the world dominate the
conversation,
who accept the world's definition
of values,
who respond with a knee-jerk reaction to everything the
world calls an emergency....

They become frightened, anxious and demoralized, self-absorbed.

THOSE are the fruits of a life focused on self.
And there is no way to experience
true freedom under those conditions.

That part of us that is connected to the world is the part that Paul says must no longer live.

What Paul said is that the worldly part of him was crucified on the cross.

Paul viewed the cross as a brutal and final reality.

Since he has been crucified with Christ...
his dreams, desires, aspiration, plans,
power, prestige, shame, guilt,

insecurities, fears and concerns
were all pronounced Dead On
Arrival at the Cross.

We have to recognize that sin is a fact of life, not just a shortcoming.

Sin is a blatant mutiny against God, and either sin or God must die in my life ...

If sin rules in me, God's life in me will be killed;

If God rules in me, sin in me will be killed."

The whole message of the cross is that you and I must die!

As Jesus said...

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "

And losing our life...is something that does not happen once and for all...

As Paul continues to be crucified with
Christ...so must we....every day.

And Paul said, "*Christ Lives In Me*" ...

Paul was totally and fully consumed with Christ.

Christ had filled his existence.

He lost his life for the sake of Christ and found his life in Christ.

His being was now Christ living in him.

Have you ever wondered how you life would be if Christ were living in your skin..
walking in your shoes?

And by dying to self...Paul said the fruits of his life have become love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

This is true freedom!

This is not about LAW...
it is about giving up the law..

The key to letting go of our life and letting Christ indwell and become our life...

is to move our focus from ourselves to
the One who gave up His life, and took
it up again.

We give him OUR life...and let it be crucified on the cross...

Then Christ gives it back to us..
reshaped into his own likeness.

It is like giving a piece of clay to a potter....

A piece of clay that I have tried to

fashion into a fine pot.

But I am not a potter and the clay barely looks like a pot at all.

But then I give that piece to a potter...
who reshapes the pot in a beautiful
piece of pottery.

That's what Christ does with our lives.

And that is what we represent in the Eucharist.
We present in the offertory the gifts
which represent our lives.

And at the same time the ordinary bread and wine are presented, we should also offer our own lives to Christ...
All of our cares and concerns...
our joys and our sorrows.

Then Christ takes the bread and wine...representing our ordinary lives...
and transforms it into his own body
and blood...

and returns it to us in
communion.

That is how we lose our life to Christ, and get it back with Christ living in us.

But too often our tendency is to look back and reach for the things that are pronounced dead in our lives.

We keep trying to resuscitate dead things that profit us nothing!

What things in your own life have you crucified...put aside forever...
only to go back and pick them up
again?

All of this leads to fruit of this world that is rotten.

And you know what happens when dead fruit lays around...
it touches and rots everything around
it, unless it is gotten rid of.

Take the challenge of the cross and ask, "The life I now live ... what does it look like?
Christ's life or my old life?"

Each episode of our lives is a crossroads to ask, "*Am I crucified with Christ?*"

To live by faith says Christ is actually living in me.
Are you living by faith or still in
bondage to the law?

*"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;
and the life which I now live in the*

*world....I live by faith in the Son of
God, who loved me and gave Himself
for me. “*

Wow! What an agent of change the Cross of Christ is!

Amen.