



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

June 14, 2009

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Acts 7:54-60

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 21:1-6

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 126

Second Lesson: Colossians 2:13-17

Gospel: Mark 2:23-28

God Made You Alive With Christ

He cancelled the written code

Live in your new reality

Did you ever notice how things that were really funny when you were a young child aren't quite as funny when you get older, like some of the "knock knock" jokes that just floored you as a kid, now you kind of just groan at them? But did you ever notice also just how some of the things you thought were pretty funny as a kid are still pretty funny when you stop and think about it?

One of the things that comes to my mind when I stop and think about this is when I was young and going to a relative's farm when they were butchering chickens and being fascinated when the chicken got away from one of my relatives and it was running around with its head cut off. I thought that was kind of funny to see – a chicken running around with its head cut off. You hear people talking about it all the time, but to see it, I thought it was humorous. Since I've been a pastor, I've been at farms a couple of times when they've been butchering chickens, and I still think it's funny to see a chicken run around with its head cut off and see the person that let it go chasing after it. I just find it funny.

I don't know what makes it so funny. I think it may be the odd sight of something that is actually dead running around and you have to chase something that is really dead but it's still moving.

Our God talks to us today about something that is dead but is still moving, but it's not quite so funny. It doesn't make me grin. Instead it brings a great sadness to my heart. You and I encounter dead stuff that is moving around every day. It might be the person that waits on us in the checkout line or standing next to us in the checkout line, the person that we sit next to at some of our children's sporting events, or maybe the person that we eat lunch with at work every day. They might actually be dead but moving around and acting as though they are alive and busy with the things of this world but still dead in their sins and the uncircumcision of their sinful nature as God talks about today.

You and I meet and come into contact with a lot of people that are chickens running around with their heads cut off. They are dead but they don't know it. It's sad. It's sad because we know that's also what we were. We were dead in our sins and our

transgressions. The difference however that causes us to rejoice and the difference, I suppose you would say that brings us together today to worship our God, is that we are no longer running around with our heads cut off. God the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts and led us to believe that Jesus is our Savior. God made us alive with Christ when we were dead.

Think about that. Dead – dead means powerless. It means we couldn't do anything spiritually. We might run around in this world and do things and say things and sound pious and even look pious at times, but spiritually we were dead as dead is dead is dead. We had nothing we could do to make ourselves alive, nothing that we could do. God did everything and we should be able to understand that today, shouldn't we? Isn't that what we just saw this morning when Ally came up front? A cute little baby sleeping, filling its britches, eating, probably basically those three things, right? – Yet spiritually dead. Then we saw the dead come to life today as God worked through water and the Word to give Ally faith that Jesus is her Savior. Before she could even say “mom” or “dad,” she now has a living faith. God has made her alive.

Think about how amazing that statement is. God makes us alive when we were dead, when we couldn't do anything, when we couldn't offer anything to him. He didn't make us alive because we try hard, because we are going to do what is good, because we are going to love others, because we are going to promise to do this, this, or this for him so then he made us alive. He made us alive before we could make any move toward him, just like we saw this morning. He made us alive because he took all the things that stood against us and just cancelled them. He cancelled the written code that stood against us.

The written code that it is talking about here is all the laws that God gave through Moses – the moral law, the civil law, the ceremonial law. In a sense it all stood against the people that Paul was writing to in Colossi. It stood against them, accusing them. Even the ceremonial laws, think of how often, if you've read in Scripture, how they became ceremonially unclean and they had to do certain things or wait a certain amount of time and then give a sacrifice, an offering, so that then they could be ceremonially clean and be a part of the people again and go into the temple again. Like after Jesus was born, Mary had to wait and then bring that offering to the temple. She was ceremonially unclean until that time.

Even the ceremonial law stood against them and, we've never been under it, but it stood against them in the sense that it showed them they were unclean and could not approach God. All of it was designed to point ahead to the need to someone who would bring true rest – the meaning of the word “Sabbath,” rest – to bring true rest, which is the forgiveness of sins. In order to bring the forgiveness of sins, all those accusations of the law, all those times that we have failed our God had to be taken away. You and I couldn't do it because we are dead, like it says. So Jesus lived perfectly in our place, kept every last bit of the Law, crossed every “t,” dotted every “i,” had every bit of punctuation right, all the grammar was right, everything was perfect in our place because you and I can't do it. Then he took all the times that you and I have sinned

against him, all the times that we have put ourselves first and said “God, you wait in line behind me because I am more important.” All the times that we have hurt others, all the evil thoughts that we’ve had, all of the evil words that we’ve spoken, all of the evil actions that we have done, intentionally or unintentionally, God took every last one of them on his shoulders and carried them to the cross and endured the hell that you and I deserve. That’s how he cancelled the written code that stood accusing us in saying “You can’t be right with God. You can’t be loved by God. You can’t have eternal life.” He took it all away through the life and death of Jesus.

It’s kind of like when you are downloading a program on your computer and that screen comes up that says “do you want to continue or do you want to cancel.” God took all of our sins and when that screen came up, he hit cancel. He cancelled it all. He forgave all our sins. It all was gone as though it never existed. That’s his love for us. He takes it away completely and absolutely.

Now God tells us to live in this new reality, the new creation that we are in Christ. These Laws, the ceremonial law, the moral law, all these things, they were a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality was found in Christ. So he says “Now live in your new reality.” He is saying this to the Christians at Colossi because they had a group of people that were there among them that were trying to tell them they had to obey the Old Testament Laws. They said they had to only eat clean food and observe all the festivals of the Old Testament. They said they had to observe the Sabbath day and do no work or anything on the Sabbath day or else they couldn’t be right with God.

Here God tells us that those were a shadow that pointed ahead to Christ. So don’t let anyone judge you by that anymore. The point that Jesus is making in our Gospel is played out here in this lesson. Man was not made for the Law. The Law was made for man. It was made for man to be a blessing for mankind, not a burden, but a blessing. And he says now that these things no longer stand against you, you are not bound by those things. There are other things we are still bound by, like God’s moral law. We are still bound by it. But even that moral law is now to be a blessing to us, not a burden. One of the marks of maturity of faith, I think, is when we see that the Law and what God is telling us to do or not do is there as a blessing to us.

What I mean is this. Think about it as a child, or maybe still in your life, do you ever find yourself thinking “If only I could do those things that God says not to do. That’s where the real fun is. That’s where the real excitement is.” In the Book of Proverbs, Folly personified calls out and says “stolen bread is sweet” and things like that, that “the things of forbidden fruit always taste better” is kind of the essence of what it is saying. And our sinful nature buys into that. Our sinful nature believes that. Our sinful nature thinks that all these commands of God are there to keep us from the fun in life and that God just wants to make us suffer.

What a load of garbage that is. Our God who loved us enough to stretch out his arms and be nailed to a cross now just wants to see us suffer, to see us not have joy and fun? No. The Law he gives to us, now the new reality for us as Christians as we see it,

is a blessing. When God says “do this and don’t do that” and I follow it, I am blessed. Not because it makes him love me more. He loves me perfectly. He’s already taken away my sins. But he gave this to me so that it would be a blessing for me.

When I do the things that God says “don’t do,” and even if no one else finds out about it, I still suffer the guilt in my own conscience of knowing that I have sinned against my God and done the things I shouldn’t do. I still suffer. But have you ever experienced in your life the hurt and the heartache that comes when you disobey God’s will and other people see it and know it and have to endure the consequences of your sin? It’s tough. It tears you apart to know that you have hurt people that you love like this.

Our God says “don’t do this” or “do that” because he knows that when we do the opposite, it is going to bring heartache into our lives. That’s why he gives us the Law, so that we can be blessed and not go down those paths that lead to such heartache and misery.

But our God also knows us through and through. He also knows that we aren’t going to view his Law as a blessing at all times. He also knows that at times we are going to think we know better than he does and not trust his love for us and we are going to go down those paths that lead to that heartache and that misery. It’s at those times that we need to run back to this truth that God knew we would do it and he still loved us and still died for us. He took that written code that stands against us that we didn’t view as a blessing, that we didn’t live in the new reality for us that it is a blessing and we disobeyed him and it brought us hardship and difficulty and heartache, and he still loved us and died for us while we were sinners. And that includes those sins that cause us so much pain. Our God loves us and has cancelled the written code that was against us. He took it away and nailed it to the cross.

So when we do fail, and we will, go back to this truth – God made you alive in Christ before you could do anything to make him love you, so his love for you will never depart. It doesn’t matter how often Satan wants to tell you that God doesn’t love you. It doesn’t make it true. I can tell you it’s dark outside for the next 20 minutes. You might get fidgety because I’m talking too long, but every time you look at the window, you’ll know it’s light out. I don’t care how often our own thoughts or the devil tells us God doesn’t love us. It doesn’t make it true.

God loves us. The proof is the cross. The proof is his forgiveness. The proof is that heaven is ours.