

Sermon for Lent Midweek 6
March 21, 2018

“No Longer Dead, But Alive”

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God who made you alive with Christ. Amen.

Dear Christians saved by Christ alone, it's so simple. Jesus is THE way. He said it clearly, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Salvation is only through Jesus, and it's entirely through Jesus.

But that doesn't stop people from looking for more. And we're not immune to the temptation to search for more either.

That idea is sometimes called Gospel Plus, that you can have the Gospel, and then you can add something to it to make it better, as if a basic Christian has the standard Gospel package, but a more advanced Christian will upgrade to the Gospel Plus package that has even more features.

Whatever the “plus” is, it takes something good that God has given us, and ruins it, and puts it in place of the pure gospel.

Sometimes that plus is rituals. I've got the gospel, plus I've got these great rituals that make me an even better Christian. That can be a greater temptation for liturgical churches like Lutherans and Catholics. We've got a great thing in the ritual of the liturgy and other things we do, like our Advent wreath or our new Paschal candle.

Rituals don't save us, though. Rituals don't make us more saved. Rituals don't make Christ's work on the cross more effective.

Sometimes that plus is mystic, eastern-style spirituality. I've got the gospel, plus I've got a secret knowledge that other Christians don't have. I'm at peace with how things are. And that thinking is more common than you might realize even if we're West River. How many people who claim to be Christians in our community – you know what I mean by that? People who say they believe in God all day long, but they don't talk like Christians, or go to church like Christians, or get into the Word like Christians. They're on the Gospel Plus – Mystical Spirituality plan. Rather than going to the Word, comfort is found in feeling a sense that God is with me, he's all around me, when I pray I can feel that he has entered the room with his presence.

Feelings and sensing don't save us. Feelings and sensing don't make us more saved. Feelings and sensing don't make Christ's work on the cross more effective.

Sometimes that plus is following the rules. I've got the gospel, plus I always do the right thing, I do just what pastor taught in catechism class, I show up to church more often than the average member, I sometimes even come to special late services at night. I've cut out cussing, even when I'm fishing and a big one breaks the line.

Following the rules doesn't save us. Following the rules doesn't make us more saved. Following the rules doesn't make Christ's work on the cross more effective.

Each of those three are good things from God that God wants to bless us through.

Rituals in church are a good thing, like our liturgy, when they reinforce the truths of God. Our Advent candles visually symbolize that Christ, the Light of the world, was born. We can say that, and we also can visualize it with the candles. Rituals focus us on Christ. Our paschal

candle's purpose is much like the Advent wreath – it's a visual way to symbolize that Christ, the Light of the world, rose from the dead. We can say it and visualize it.

Mystic spirituality, where truth is sensed and felt rather than being written down and spelled out in a logical, rigid manner is a good thing from God because God doesn't spell out every answer to every question in the Bible. Rather than misusing mystic spirituality to make up some truth or deny what has been spelled out for us, use it where God wants you to use it.

How does the Trinity work? We know what God tells us, but we don't know how it works. We know that he is three persons, and the Father is not the Holy Spirit, but yet the three are one God. There's a place to thank God that we don't only have a logical part of our brain, but also a sensing, artistic part of our brains that can say, "Ok God, that's who you are."

Following the rules is a good thing from God – he promises, for example, to bless those who honor and respect authority. And following the rules generally leads to good things and keeps a person out of trouble and able to focus on serving God. We follow the rules because we're saved, not to get saved.

And that's the good news of the Gospel. There's only one package. There's no Gospel Plus, or Gospel Gold Package, or Gospel Anniversary Collector's Edition. There's just the gospel, and it's for everyone.

There's no need for a so-called "Plus" (and, in fact, the Plus obscures and leads away from the Gospel, rather than enhancing it.) You don't need more than Christ, because God took care of everything.

Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses.

We don't need a plus, in fact, that the beauty of the pure Gospel message, because even when we were dead, angry, hostile, blind sinners, God took care of everything. He made us alive! Here's how:

God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross.

We know God's demands. The 10 commandments are a quick summary. No other gods, keep God's name holy, remember the sabbath day. We didn't measure up. In fact, if you picture our spiritual situation like a court, we've got a list of accusations a mile long against us.

God erased our record. He expunged it so our record is now clean. He did it by nailing all our sins to the cross with Jesus. That matter has been concluded. We're forgiven.

And so, God has disarmed the rulers and authorities that would like to press charges against us, and still like to make their accusations. The devil is out of ammo. He can talk all he wants, he can drag up your darkest secrets, but the accusation doesn't stick. He's been disarmed.

That's a fact. It's a fact proven by Jesus' triumph, or we might call it a victory parade through hell itself. We confess it in the creed – the first part of Jesus' exultation after being buried – he descended into hell. Why? Peter tells us, Jesus went and proclaimed his victory, his total and complete victory of sin, death, and our enemy the devil.

So there's no need worry that you need something more, and no need to wonder if there's something more out there that could help you get more saved, because God took care of everything, and he's given you everything. He erased and took away the record of your sins by nailing it to the cross and he triumphed over your enemies in Christ, and you share in the victory through faith. Amen.