

Romans 6:1-14 “When Death Becomes Life”

We continue with Paul’s amazing letter to the Romans about going on and being partners with spreading the Good News into Spain. Here in Chapter 6, Paul is very much interested in talking about our new life in Christ - and how that is so different than our old lives. If we look at world history, we can separate those things which occurred before Christ and those that happened after Christ. It is the same in our Christian lives, but we have to both live like new creatures, and stand in the gap with those who do not have a relationship with Jesus. What does that look like?

Brene’ Brown says, “Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We walk our talk—we are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with those beliefs.”

She goes on to emphasize some things which I think make us focus on our discipleship in new ways. Yes, we need Bible study and prayer and worship and service and witness - but think about those things in connection with:

“ Don’t choose silence over what is right. It’s not our jobs to make others comfortable or to be liked by everyone. Faith has been so tough for me over the past year because one of my faith behaviors is to find the face of God in everyone. Ugh. That means rather than hating people, I have to hate only their ideas. Rather than shaming and blaming people, I have to hold them accountable.

Another one of my faith behaviors is no dehumanizing language.

On my list of courage behaviors is something my mom taught us growing up: Show up for people in pain and don't look away. Choose courage over comfort. ”

Here is some final Brene' Brown advice which I think is brilliant:

“Live BIG (boundaries, integrity, and generosity). Ask yourselves in your relationships - ‘What boundaries need to be in place for me (so that I can react with integrity and generosity) about the intentions, words, and actions of others?’”

So we need boundaries if we are to deal with people honestly, wholly and with grace. Let's turn to our text which in The Voice version provides this introduction:

(Voice) We arrive here, children of a common ancestor, Adam. As such, we have inherited his traits, physically and spiritually. Although our sin may be of a different sort than his, we sin no less than Adam. The proof of that is death. Adam opens the way for sin and death to pursue us and run rampant across the earth. But from the beginning, God has a plan to reverse the curse. At just the right moment in human history, Jesus arrives, a son of Adam and the Son of God. Through His faithful obedience to His Father, He challenges the twin powers of sin and death and defeats them. Sin no longer reigns unchecked. Death no longer has the last word.

Romans 6:1-14

“How should we respond to all of this? Is it good to persist in a life of sin so that grace may multiply even more? Absolutely not! How can we die to a life where sin ruled over us and then invite sin back into our lives? Did someone forget to tell you that when we were initiated into Jesus the Anointed through baptism’s ceremonial washing, we entered into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through this baptism into death so that just as God the Father, in all His glory, resurrected the Anointed One, we, too, might walk *confidently out of the grave* into a new life. *To put it another way*: if we have been united with Him to share in a death like His, don’t you understand that we will also share in His resurrection?_We know this: whatever we used to be with our old sinful ways has been nailed to His cross. So our entire record of sin has been canceled, and we no longer have to bow down to sin’s power. A dead man, you see, cannot be bound by sin. But if we have died with the Anointed One, we believe that we shall also live together with Him. So we stand firm in the conviction that death holds no power over God’s Anointed, because He was resurrected from the dead never to face death again. When He died, He died to whatever power sin had, once and for all, and now He lives completely to God. So here is how to picture yourself now that you have been initiated into Jesus the Anointed: you are dead to sin’s power and influence, but you are alive to God’s rule.

Don’t invite *that insufferable tyrant of sin* back into your mortal body so you won’t become obedient to its *destructive* desires. Don’t offer your bodily members to sin’s service as tools of

wickedness; instead, offer your body to God as those who are alive from the dead, and devote the parts of your body to God as tools for justice *and goodness in this world*. For sin is no longer a tyrant over you; indeed you are under grace and not the law.

THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

THANKS BE TO GOD! Amen

(Voice) Now sin and death no longer define us, but grace does: God's favor has been given freely to us through His Son, Jesus, who liberates us from sin's power.

Here is one of my favorite Fred Craddock stories to drive this point home:

“I don't like anybody to call me and say, ‘Next!’ I have a name. I'm different than others. I tried to get that clear in my head when I was invited to preach at Riverside Church in New York some years ago. William Sloan Coffin, Jr., was the pastor and he said, ‘Can you come up and fill the pulpit? I have to be away.’ So I said I could come. It was in the summer. I was free. He said, ‘You can stay in my apartment, it's near the church. I'll tell the super that you're coming.’

So I went to New York and the super let me into his apartment. Bill was a bachelor at the time, and you could tell it. He was a great preacher, but he didn't keep house. It really was a terrible apartment. I woke up Sunday and went into the kitchen to get something from the refrigerator for breakfast. A note on the door

said, 'There's nothing in here, Fred. Don't look inside.' Of course, I looked inside. There was nothing in there.

He had told me I could go to the church and get breakfast there. I thought, great, I'll eat with the church staff and find out where I'm to sit, stand, and who does this and that during the service. It will be a great orientation.

I grabbed my robe and walked to the church. When I got there, there was a line of men down the side of the building and around the corner, over two hundred people. I got in line.

'Next!' I went to the little window and I got a scoop of egg, a sausage patty, a biscuit and a cup of coffee.

'Next!' I found a place at a table across from a man who had seen better days. We ate. Finally I said to him, 'Where are you from?'

He said, 'Well, here and Albany.'

I asked, 'What did you do in Albany?'

'I was a stockbroker. Was doing well, too, but the bottle got me. Lost my job, my house, my family, my marriage, everything, so here I am. My daughter said I could live with her as long as I stayed sober, but she didn't want to raise her kids around a drunken old man. I was sober for four or five weeks, and then, I couldn't do it. So I'm back.'

He asked, 'Where are you from.'

I said, 'Georgia.'

'What do you do?'

'I'm a preacher.'

He laughed and said, 'The bottle gets all of us, doesn't it?'

When he said that to me, I wanted to get up, stand up on the table and say, 'Listen, you losers. I am Dr. Fred B. Craddock, the Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and in a few minutes I'll be preaching in one of the great pulpits in America and you'll be back on the street. I'm not like you!'

But I didn't say that, because it would not have been true. You can be at the peak of your earning power, or you can put your head in the post office window and ask, 'Are the checks going to be late again this month.'

There's a sense that it is all the same.

The invitation into the kingdom of God is quite simple. A voice says, 'Next!'"

Could it be that...no matter who or what we are, ultimately, in God's Kingdom, we are in the same line?"

AND THAT'S THE MESSAGE!