

5/4/18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

He used to be called Saul. Now he is known as Paul. But that's not all that changed. He used to hate Jesus; he used to persecute everyone who believed in Jesus. Now look at him; in today's reading we see Paul standing up in a crowd telling everyone what it means that Jesus has died on the cross and has been raised again to life. Clearly, it wasn't just Jesus who had been raised to life. Paul had been raised to life, too.

Before it happened, Paul had been spiritually dead. You and I were born the same way. The Bible says so: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). To be spiritually dead is to be spiritually separated from God and helpless to do anything about it. Being spiritually dead rules out any hope we may have of "finding" God. Dead people can't "find" things. God had to find Paul (see Acts 19:1-19) and God has to find us, too.

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to Paul and Barnabas, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: ... "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus." Acts 13:15-16, 26-33

God gives the gift of faith to us the same way he gave it to Paul. He uses the message about Jesus. What a message! You can hear Paul speaking it in today's lesson. Jesus accepted God's punishment for sin which we deserved. He gave his life for ours. He rescued us from spiritual death. With this message, God does something so wonderful and miraculous that we wouldn't be any less amazed if we saw a corpse brought back to life: he awakens our trust in Jesus. He makes us spiritually alive. He lets us see his love clearly, and he holds us close to him and his blessings in this life and the next.

Jesus' death and resurrection happened only once, but God gives him to us over and over again through the message of what Jesus has done. Whenever God uses his Word to reveal the world's Savior, he gives hopeless sinners hope. He gives condemned sinners a bright future. He raises spiritual corpses from the dead and gives the gift of spiritual life. The gift is for you and me again today. Because of Jesus, all of your sin is forgiven. In him, you have the gift of life.

***Prayer:** Dear Jesus, risen Savior, you were dead and have now been raised to life. Take away every impulse in me that wants to run from you and raise me to spiritual life every day by the power of your forgiving love. Amen.*

(WELS E-Devotion, adapted)

...See you in worship.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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