### “A Resurrection Like His” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 25, 2023

**Romans 6:3–11**

3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. . . 11So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**Matthew 10:26–31**

26 “Have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. . . 29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. 30And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

To some degree, we all imitate others. We learn what’s normal or we learn what’s cool, and we adopt that behavior. It comes naturally, that is, we are partly unconscious that we are doing it. Paul wants us to consciously emulate the Savior, so that we will have an experience like his, that is, symbolically rise from the dead and be free from sin. In Paul’s teaching, believers participate in the Messiah; we are plugged in to the Messiah and we replicate some of his experiences. The Messiah died to sin, and so do we. When we pledge our will to do God’s will and to sin no more, we experience a kind of symbolic death. Our old self is crucified; our old motivations are put to death. This death to sin and rebirth to new life is acted out and symbolized by baptism. Paul uses dramatic language because salvation was a very dramatic experience. Going under the water symbolizes a death to the old life of sin. Rising out of the water symbolizes rising to a new life. He tells us we must “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11). Present yourself and “your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (6:13), Paul says. Imagine yourself as having died with Christ, and being risen with him, as well, even while you are still in this body. We can have these effects even now, in this lifetime. We can “walk in newness of life” (6:4).

This is Paul’s experience, and he thinks it is the experience that all Christians will have. But, in fact, many Christians had a very different experience, and many didn’t understand Paul’s teaching on this point. Many people have a much less dramatic spiritual life than Paul had. They experience it as children who know they are loved by their parents, but who grow in an awareness of that love, a more gradual and less traumatic experience than Paul’s death-and-life experience.

Different people are drawn to different images and styles of salvation teaching. Jesus’ message is generally of the more peaceful and gradual type. We grow up in God’s light, like a plant, “first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head” (Mark 4:28). Spiritual growth is natural and normal. We admire God’s beauty as we admire the beauty of the earth. God shines on us like the sun (Matt 5:45). God knows everything about our lives, and so we need not be afraid. We can trust. We are given the pleasant image of sparrows, and told that we are worth more than many sparrows. This was memorialized in the hymn where we sing “his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.”

Further, we can have faith that everything will be revealed. There will be no hidden crimes that will not be uncovered, nor any hidden good deeds that will go unrecognized. Every act of secret sexual misconduct will be revealed, and its wrong fully exposed. Every act of unselfishness will also be revealed and remembered. Everything will become known.

In the next life, there will be therapy and education and emotional repair. Real needs will be addressed, but there will be no more hiding of evil or disguising it. Shakespeare has a character, when thinking about how the wicked sometimes buy out the law, say “’tis not so above; There is no shuffling, there the action lies in his true nature; and we ourselves compell’d, Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults, To give in evidence” (*Hamlet* 3.3.60–64). In heaven, there is no sneaking around, no hiding, and no corrupting of the law.

How can we combine the lessons in these two passages and make them relevant for us today? If there is any corruption in which you have participated, you can repudiate it and allow it to be part of the body of sin that you renunciate. Think of your baptism and determine that the rising from the water means a new life for you. If you have done something of which you feel ashamed, ask forgiveness and determine not to do it again. Remember you walk in newness of life. God cares for you and knows everything that is going on in your life. Realign your life with God’s will. Make a serious determination that you will put God’s will first in your life. Imagine Christ walking by your side, teaching you but also accompanying you, like an older brother or a friend.

Imagine him telling you nature parables as you walk, pointing out an ear of corn and saying how it grows through stages, and that *we* do, as well. Imagine him telling you that God is shining on you, like the sun, but never setting. Resolve to *hear* him guiding you, urging you to grow spiritually, forever. And then imagine being raised again, after your life is over. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3).