

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Living in Crucified Flesh

Rev. Toby Byrd

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24, ESV)

Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh and have Christ living within them. St. Paul tells us, ***“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:11–14, ESV)*** St. Peter speaks of Baptism this way, ***“Baptism . . . now saves you.” (1 Peter 3:21, ESV)***

Circumcision is the removal the foreskin, but baptism is the removal and replacement of the heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The heart is renewed and regenerated with the washing of the Holy Spirit, and the baptized one is made a child of God, robed in the very righteousness of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. This is now Cedric having been baptized this morning. Cedric and all who have been baptized have ***“put on Christ”*** and have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:19-20; 3:27; 4:7). They now have One who will lead them in their battle against the flesh, who will help them in their battle against Satan. Moreover, this divine helper is greatly needed, for no one cannot defeat their flesh or Satan by their own power, ***“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:17–18, ESV)*** Indeed, according to St. Paul not only have those who belong to Christ put Him on, they have also ***“crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (v. 24)*** But all too often these words are said to mean that we have the ability within ourselves to crucify our flesh, to overcome our passions and desires. But do we?

Lest we forget, man without the Spirit, that is, natural, unregenerate man, lives according to the ways of the world, satisfying the passions and desires of his flesh. For such men there are no restrictions, no limits hindering the fulfillment of their passion. We need only read St. Paul’s letter to the Romans to understand unregenerate man. St. Paul wrote, ***“They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.” (Romans 1:29–32, ESV)*** ***“Claiming to be wise, they became fools,” (Romans 1:22, ESV)*** ***“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:24–25, ESV)*** Every person born into this world is brought forth as an unregenerate man. Such were you at birth.

However, in the opening verse of the Epistle Reading for today, St. Paul encourages us, saying that if we are to crucify the flesh we must, ***“walk by the Spirit”*** doing so, ***“you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”*** (*Galatians 5:16, ESV*) Indeed, is this not the desire of every true Christian? Sure it is because without the Spirit we cannot walk the walk of a follower of Christ. St. Paul continues, ***“the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”*** (v. 17). With the indwelling Spirit our Lord prepares you for warfare against the flesh.

Warfare against the flesh? This is indeed the situation of every earth-bound saint. Although you were given a newly washed heart in baptism, you have not yet shed your corrupted flesh, therefore, you are still inclined to sin. Because of your corrupted flesh you do not love God as you should. You are aroused to anger, envy, impatience, sexual desire, and all things sinful. The desires of the flesh pull at you, tempt you, crying out, “do my bidding.” But as a saint your desire is not to carry them out. However, the only way to break the power of the flesh is to kill it! With the death of the flesh comes life, but that only happens in Christ, the Crucified One. Therefore, your desire is to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires, but you cannot do this on your own, you cannot do this by your own strength. You need help and this help is given to you by Christ, the Crucified One when He gives you the Spirit to lead you.

You walk by the Spirit, that is, a Spirit led discipline. It is the Spirit who reminds you that the desires of the flesh are contrary to God’s Word. He warns you of God’s wrath against sin, not only frightening you away from succumbing to the flesh’s desires but leading you to obey God’s will because of your great love for Him. As the Spirit leads you to resist your flesh, you are crucifying it, nailing it to the cross with its passions and desires. However, your flesh is still alive, still desiring to live by worldly ways, but if it is fastened to the cross hand and foot, it cannot. So, led by the Spirit and belonging to Christ, you will continue to crucify the flesh, being aware of its desires but not yielding to them.

The Spirit who is given to you to help you crucify your flesh is the Holy Spirit of God. Only He is strong enough to lead you away from sin. This is the Holy Spirit you received in the blessed waters of Baptism. There, at the font, as the water was poured over your head and the pastor spoke the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” God gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith. Furthermore, St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans reminds you that you were crucified and buried with Christ in those blessed waters (Rom. 6:1-10). In fact, he tells you that you, ***“must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*** (*Romans 6:11, ESV*) Then, in his letter to St. Titus, St. Paul tells you God ***“saved [you], not because of works done by [you] in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on [you] richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”*** (*Titus 3:5–6, ESV*) So, yes, you received the Holy Spirit when you were baptized.

Thus, the Spirit spoken of by St. Paul in our text for today is not your spirit. Truth is, you cannot rely on your spirit. Jesus, speaking to the apostles while in the Garden of Gethsemane said to them, ***“So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** (*Matthew 26:40–41, ESV*) Undoubtedly, the apostles did not desire to succumb to sleep while the Lord prayed, but they did. Their flesh was not up to the task. Neither is yours at times. Yes, you desire to be led by the Spirit of God, to do those things that are pleasing to God and those things which will not raise His ire against you, but often you fail in this endeavor. Too often your flesh gets the upper hand and leads you into sin.

At such times you are mortified, angry at yourself for having succumbed to sin. However, it is not only your flesh that you battle against, but you also battle against Satan who is constantly seeking to pull you away from the Spirit, he is constantly seeking to pull your crucified flesh away from the cross. When that happens you need to cling ever more to the Cross of Christ, remembering His bloody, atoning, sacrifice that paid the penalty for your sin. That sacrifice which opened the door to His heavenly Father's heart, clearing the way for His love and forgiveness to be poured out upon you.

Belonging to Christ and cleansed in the waters of Baptism, you have been dressed in the armor of God with faith, hope, and the sword of the Spirit. These are the blessed gifts of God that lead you and help you to fight, these gifts help you to crucify the desires of the flesh. These are the nails that fasten your flesh to the cross, forcing it to be subject to the Spirit. Blessed by these gifts of faith, these nails help you through this life until your last breath. On that day, when God separates your soul from your body, putting off your corrupted flesh, you will be released from your earthly struggle. No longer will the nails be needed. You will be released from your struggle of this life to await the resurrection where you will be given new, pure, sinless flesh without any sinful passions or desires. What a marvelous day that will be!

But until that day we are reminded that God tells us to *Walk by the Spirit* for God has given Him to us that we may live out our days pleasing to Him. That we may live out our days led by the Spirit, *Living in Crucified Flesh*, in repentance, confessing our sins with the assurance of God's forgiveness for the sake of His beloved Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose death upon the Altar of the Cross, won forgiveness for all men. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.