



October 30, 2016

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“CHURCH OF THE LIVING DEAD”

– *Romans 6:1-23*

- As believers in Christ, we are alive in Christ. Yet the disease of sin is alive in all of us. We are dead to sin, but alive in Christ, and as such, we are in-between life and death. But, until we are in between we have a choice to sin or not, so let us choose not to sin until our transformation is complete.

Just down the hill outside is Monroeville Mall. In 1978, just ten years after releasing the iconic horror movie “Night of the Living Dead,” Gorge Romero, a Carnegie Mellon Graduate, released “Dawn of the Dead.” Which was filmed just down the hill at Monroeville Mall. Ever since then, Monroeville Mall has been known by horror movie fans as the “Zombie Mall.” Like it or not, Monroeville Mall and Pittsburgh by extension have become important places to people who are into scary zombie movies. Because it is around Halloween time, and because Zombie entertainment seems to be extremely popular right now, I am going to use the whole idea behind zombies to illustrate how believers in Christ are dead to sin, but reborn, alive in Christ. As Paul says in our scripture today, “I am using an example from everyday life because of our human limitations.”

Some people love zombie movies. Some people hate zombie movies. Some people think that horror movies are violent and scary and that no good can come of them. Some people just think that zombie movies are so far-fetched and imaginative that they are simply silly and not worth paying attention to. After all, zombies are supposed to be re-animated corpses. A scary thought to be sure, but the zombies we see in movies and TV are physical impossibilities. There is no way that dead bodies can be alive.

But don't be too quick to dismiss the idea that the dead can live. This is one of the foundational principles that we believe in as Christians. That, because of Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, we who believe in Jesus can live forever. In fact, in the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 26, verse 19, it is written, "But your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise— let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead." This sounds like it could be predicting an epidemic of zombies. But what Isaiah is writing about is nothing like the scary and gruesome zombies we see on TV... Isaiah is predicting what it will be like for us on the day of salvation, when God establishes God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This prophecy was made a reality by the actions that God took in Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself to make sure that all who trust in him will be raised from the dead to life eternal with God and with one another.

But the eternal life that we gain through Jesus Christ, does not only begin on the great and terrible "day of the Lord" at the end of time. Somehow, right now, every one of us who believes in Jesus has been raised from death and into eternal life. We are both alive and dead at the same time. Kind of like a zombie... except without a scary and dangerous desire to eat people. Our purpose and the purpose of your average horror movie zombie are very different.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are dead to sin, and alive in Christ when we are baptized. Paul says that we are buried with Christ, and raised with Christ. This should not be a surprise to those who know the story of Jesus. In John's gospel chapter 3 verse 5, Jesus is recorded as saying, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." This is what we say happens to each and every person who confesses with their mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead.

I think most of us here this morning are in the category of people who are saved by faith in Christ. If you are unsure about this, or you want to experience new life by believing in Jesus, come talk to me after the service. I would be happy to talk about it with you!

Paul tells us in our scripture that all of us who are united to Christ, are dead. And yet we are alive. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ. That means, that we are no longer doomed by our built in human desire to make bad choices. In fact, because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we have the power to choose to live like heavenly beings. We can make good choices instead of bad choices. God's spirit has given us the power to obey God's commandments. Paul says that because of God's free gift of new life in Christ, we now get to choose every day... are we slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience to God's way of living, which leads to righteousness? Will we choose to continue like zombies who have no choices, or will we choose to live, to be obedient to God?

Choosing to be obedient to God is not possible for us to do without Jesus. No matter how hard we try, we will fall short. We will make bad choices. We will turn away from God, and serve other gods like money, power, alcohol, or security. We will make selfish choices that do not love others. But now, we have the choice! So Paul is simply saying... listen people, make the choice to be obedient to God! Choose life!

This is the message for us today. We in between sin and death, and obedience to Christ and life. So now we choose to live into our salvation every day! The Holy Spirit gives us the power to live like Jesus intends us to. I can tell you in two steps exactly how to choose to be an obedient slave to God every day. I read the instructions in Matthew 22:37-40, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. AND Love your neighbor as yourself."

I can give you some practical steps to choose obedience to God instead of sin and death every day. First, read scripture. You might want to read a daily devotional from God's word. You might want to google search a reading plan to read the whole Bible through over a years' time, reading a few chapters a day. You might want to follow a lectionary, which gives you readings from the Hebrew

Bible, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the letters in the bible every day. If you google the word “lectionary” you will find it. Whatever method you use to read scripture, do it. Don’t make excuses, just read the Bible on some regular pattern.

Second, pray every day. Talk to God. It doesn’t have to be perfect. It only needs to be regular and honest. Share your desires and requests with God, thank God, and ask God to guide you. If you have no idea what to say, no problem. Start with the Lord’s prayer. Or the Jesus prayer. If you don’t know then, no problem... google to the rescue.

Third, worship God in community. God intends us to live life in common with other believers in Christ. In the letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 10:24-25 Paul says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” You cannot choose to be obedient to God and not be a part of a worshipping community. This community does not need to be a traditional church, but that is the easiest way to do this. Most Christian churches have regular worship and gathering times. The important thing is to share your Christian life with other believers. That means you must make friends with the people you worship with. You must be real with them and let them in to your life. It’s messy, but community does not exist when people keep one another at arm’s length. You can’t merely consume a worship experience; you must participate in some way in the congregation you are in. You simply cannot be a private person who attends worship and meetings. Communion only exists when we let others in to our lives.

Each of these practical steps I have listed are some suggestions for how to be slaves to obedience to God. In order to obey God, we must first hear God. That is why the steps are all about scripture, prayer, and other believers. **This is where we hear from God.** Then of course the final step is to choose to do what God wants us to do in all things. This isn’t easy, but, because of the Holy Spirit that raised us from the dead to new life in Christ, it is possible for us who work at it. It is a process. Paul says later on in the letter to the Romans in chapter 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Conforming is a process

that requires our efforts. But the effort is worth it because God guarantees the results!

God promises that those who believe will be the Church of the Living Dead. Not just on the day of judgement at the end of time, but now, on earth. You see, we are the exact opposite of zombies. Most things God is involved in are opposite of how they seem. In zombie movies, you are alive with freedom to be a person but once you are infected, you become a zombie. A zombie has no choice but to follow its desire to eat people. That is the only thing zombies can do. They are slaves to their hunger. Believers in Christ are the exact opposite of zombies. We start out as humans who have no choice but to be slaves to our sinful desires. But, once we are indwelled by the Holy Spirit, we become slaves to obedience to God. We are finally free to live life the way God intends us to! And that is exciting! It is not scary at all.

So this Halloween, every time you see someone dressed up as a zombie remember that as a believer in Christ we can choose not to be like a zombie. Part of God's plan involves choice. So don't justify lack of obedience to God because God's grace is so good that you know you will be saved. Let's choose to be obedient to God like Paul says. Let us read scripture, pray to God, and live life in common with other believers. I know it sounds like work, but really, choosing sin is work. The work of being obedient to God is the real gift! Just as Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."