

“The Transformed Life”

John 5:1-9 ORLC 5-5-13

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Last week, we spent a good deal of time talking about how our faith is not formed or enhanced by what we do. Jesus is not the great law-giver with the “how-to’s” of Christian living as the focus of His message. Jesus does not endure the nails of the cross and shed His blood so that He can now instruct His disciples to go and live morally virtuous lives and be right with God by loving your neighbor. Jesus would have joined with the Pharisees if that was the central teaching of God. Of course, it is His desire that we do love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and that we do love our neighbor – with the same vigor with which we love ourselves. If this were attainable, there would be no need for the cross.

It is not about “me” and what I do. Our sinful self always wants to hear Christ’s words of grace and promise and turn it into something that we can do to save ourselves. This is not about living the “transformed life” as so many want to make the focus of life in the church – as if your righteousness is a measure of all that you do. What could you possibly take before God to show Him and say, “Here, here, look at what I have done”? This is about being transformed out of death and into life, and this is the work of Christ.

The law shows us what we ought to do, not what we can do. God designed the law to act as our tutor—to show us just how wide a gap exists between what we must accomplish to be saved and what we cannot accomplish – because we can't. Love the Lord with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. Then, when we see our plight for what it truly is, the gospel steps in and promises that God has done what we could not do. If we interpret the law of God as being attainable through human effort, we will misinterpret countless Scriptural passages.

Your salvation is a passive event. This is why we baptize babies. First, God loves babies and He wants them to be washed clean, reborn, and saved. But also, we baptize babies because coming to faith in Christ is not a work that you do. God's salvation has never been a work of any of His people.

Adam and Eve did nothing to earn God's gracious response. Adam and Eve deserved to die immediately and be judged. God, instead, promised to send His Son. God repeated this promise to Abraham, called him out of the land of Haran, called him to faith, and Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

God saved the Israelites while they stood passive in the face of the Egyptians. Of course, they first rejected God and said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? . . .Is this not what we said to you in Egypt; 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians.'"

Moses says, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. . . The Lord will fight for you and you

have only to be silent” [Exodus 14:12-14].

In the days of Noah, God Himself shut the door of the Ark to save Noah and his family. God is the actor in our salvation. By nature, we are totally corrupt and dead in our sins. It is God that must give us life, because we will not find life in this body without Him.

God’s sows the seed of salvation into our dead hearts. So, all praise, honor and glory goes to Him alone. If you think you have some part in this, then you take glory away from Jesus, and his innocent, bitter sufferings and death for you. If there is any path into God’s eternal kingdom that you help to make; if there is any door that you can open by what you do and say “Here, here, look at this”; then Jesus did not need to hang on a cross and be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

If you or any of Adam’s children could escape the judgment of the law by active participation in something, then God’s interaction with His people throughout Scripture makes no sense. Take the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, as we heard in our Gospel reading. Salvation only comes through passive receiving of grace.

Now, this is not what the man expected. He was living under the folklore superstition that the angels occasionally stirred the waters and if you were the first one in, you would receive healing. These pools were fed by outside sources, so there was an occasional “stirring” of the water, and this practice of seeking healing fed right into our sinful nature’s desire to save our self.

This man had been an invalid for 38 years. He had been lying there

a long time, probably much of his life, but he couldn't get into the pool by himself fast enough. He couldn't do enough to get healed. Someone always got there first.

Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be healed?" The man replies, "Of course, but someone always gets to the water before me." Classic misunderstanding of how God works: the rich young man asks Jesus, "What must I do to be saved?" The crowd on Pentecost asks Peter, "What must we do?" It is what our sinful mind always asks.

Jesus says, "It is not about you. Get up, take up your bed, and walk." God healing us is a passive event – whether that is the healing of our bodies from sickness or injury, or whether that is the ultimate healing of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

If someone is sick and their health does not improve, it is not because you didn't pray enough or pray "hard" enough. Such thinking is poison. It is the opposite of the life giving words of Christ. Life is a gift. Every day, every breath is a gift.

Even more, if someone tells you that you have to do certain things to really be saved or "have enough faith," their message is poison. Faith is a gift. Abraham received faith and it was credited to him as righteousness. You received faith, and it is credited to you as righteousness.

You have been transformed. You have been healed. It is a gift you have received. This is about being transformed out of death and into life, and this is the work of Christ.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!! Amen.