

Sixth Sunday of Easter; Confirmation Sunday

May 21, 2017

John 14:15-21 (EHV) – ¹⁵“If you love me, hold on to my commands. ¹⁶I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. ¹⁷He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see him or know him. You know him because he stays with you and will be in you. ¹⁸“I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹The one who has my commands and holds on to them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Introduction

The question of whether or not you're alive is a pretty easy one to answer. There are four main “vital signs” that people in medical professions will check – temperature, heartbeat or pulse, breathing, and blood pressure. Most of the kids in catechism class had tons of energy this year, but I probably should've checked the vitals of a couple of them every so often just to make sure they were still with us.

Whether or not a person is alive is easy to determine. *How* a person stays alive is more difficult to answer – at least for me. How does the heart keep beating and the lungs keep working for a century? What keeps my body at a steady 98-or-so degrees? As a pastor, it's easy to fall back on the biblical answer – God brings me to life and God keeps me alive until he's ready for me. But I'll leave it up to someone else to explain it from a physiological point of view. Maybe they'd trace it back to electrical impulses, or something like that, but what is it that causes those?

Theme: You Live Because Jesus Lives!

I'm much more comfortable explaining things spiritually. That's because the Bible gives us some pretty clear insights into the matter. In today's Gospel Lesson, Jesus tells us *that* we're alive and he tells us the *why* and the *how*, too. Here it is – **YOU LIVE BECAUSE JESUS LIVES!** That simple truth **applies to who you are**. And it **applies to what you do**.

Part I: That applies to who you are.

We're not too far away from Easter yet, are we, to forget how our living is connected to Jesus' living? He was truly and physically put to death, but he was physically raised to life again. And his bodily resurrection guarantees our bodily resurrection. You and I will die someday, but Jesus is going to call us right out of our graves when he returns on the Last Day. That's certainly true, but Jesus has more in mind in these words than just the physical resurrection of the body.

Over the past decade or more, Hollywood has had a weird infatuation with the undead. Movies and shows about zombies and vampires draw people to theaters and take up space on DVRs. The phrase that they sometimes use for those beings – the walking dead – has a spiritual parallel, doesn't it? One time, the apostle Paul said that we **“were dead in our sins, in which we used to live.”** Did you catch that? We were dead and alive at the same time; physically alive, but spiritually dead; dead men walking.

But just a couple verses after that one, Paul says that **“God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”** Now we're alive, both physically and spiritually.

Jesus doesn't get into it here in much detail, but we know from the rest of the Bible how we came to life. The Holy Spirit worked saving faith in our hearts through the gospel. When we heard the good news of what Jesus did for us – how he lived perfectly for us and how he died to pay the penalty of all our sins – we were born again through the gift of faith that the gospel produced. Sometimes that happens when the gospel is used together with the water of baptism.

As Jesus was in the upper room on the night before his death, he talked to his disciples about the *how* of our life. He talked about **“the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see him or know him. You know him because he stays with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”**

You live because Jesus lives. That applies to who you are. Doctrinally speaking, it's known as the “mystic union.” Union – because there's a very close connection between God and his believers. Mystic – because it goes beyond explanation or observation. We're in Jesus; Jesus is in us. Jesus is one with the Father. And the Holy Spirit also comes into play; he's in us and stays with us, too. Don't bother trying to look it up in a medical journal or view it under the lens of a microscope. You can't measure it by a stethoscope or a cuff around your upper arm or two fingers on your wrist.

Nevertheless, you can sense that you're alive in Christ, can't you? A new spirit lives in you, and you can detect its breathing as it takes control of your life. You can sense the feverish burning of God's love inside of yourself. You can feel the methodical heartbeat of God's will reshaping your new will. Joy and peace course their way through your spiritual veins.

Transition

That's all because Jesus lives. He lives in you. He's a part of you. He's determined who you are today and on into the future. And because he lives, that has a huge impact on what you do.

Part II: That applies to what you do.

Shortly before speaking these words, Jesus had gotten down on his hands and knees and washed his disciples' feet. He did that to show them what it meant to be his disciples and members of his kingdom. Jesus' living followers are servants who live for Jesus and for others. Just moments before our text, he said: **“Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing.”** Then he goes on in the words before us: **“If you love me, hold on to my commands. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever... Because I live, you also will live... The one who has my commands and holds on to them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him and show myself to him.”**

Most of you have stood beneath cross and altar and vowed that **BECAUSE JESUS LIVES, YOU WILL LIVE**. Six of our members will make that promise again this morning. **“Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching? Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God as long as you live?”** And how did you answer – how will these six young men and women answer? **“I do, and I ask God to help me.”**

You and I live because Jesus lives. And since our living Savior lives in us – since his Holy Spirit lives in us – we can't do *anything but* live for him and others. It's as natural for us as our lungs breathing and our hearts beating.

If you love Jesus – and I know you do – hold onto his commands. You know them. Take time to regularly review them. And now keep them. Live them. Love God. Love your neighbor. Even love your enemies. **“We love because he first loved us.”**

What does this mean for you and me, practically speaking? What does this look like in real life? It means we'll keep coming to church week after week – not because we have to, but because it's where we get to hear God's Word together with our brothers and sisters in the faith and offer our combined prayers and praises to our Savior. It means that a Bible will be somewhere on a nightstand or end table in our homes and that we'll open it up and feast regularly on the banquet of the life-giving gospel. It means that we'll talk to God in prayer. It means that we'll guard our speech and keep our minds and bodies pure. It means that we'll help out around the house. It means that we'll eat and exercise properly. It means that we'll work faithfully as students or employees. It means that we'll figure out what our talents are and put them to use in school, church, home, work, and community. Maybe it's serving as a peer tutor. Maybe it's ushering or greeting or helping with the PowerPoint slides. Maybe it's playing an instrument before or during worship. Maybe it's teaching Sunday school. Maybe it's volunteering at a nursing home or public library. Maybe it's hosting an international student during the school year. Maybe it's distributing flyers for VBS.

Conclusion

Because Jesus lives, we'll live. Because Jesus lives, we're alive in him. Because Jesus lives, we have life with him. Let's live that life to the fullest! To God be all the glory! Amen.