

*Matthew 10:24-39*

*6 Pentecost*

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*Church of Our Saviour, Charlottesville*

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*Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Like all virtues, coming to church on Sundays is a good habit, something we do regardless of how we're feeling. We may come inspired and excited, or we may come tired and depressed, but we come. It's good to step back, though, and ask ourselves why we come. What do we want from God? And what are we willing to pay for it? Thinking of these very questions, someone once wrote this reflection: "I'd like to buy fifty cents worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a warm glass of milk or a nice nap in the sunshine. I don't want enough to make me really love a Jehovah's Witness, or someone with a different skin color. I don't want to have to pick beets with a migrant farm worker, or build a house alongside of someone who is destitute. I want to feel good, not be transformed. I'd like to buy fifty cents worth of God, please."

Sometimes we may want just enough of God to comfort us without changing us, but that is not the offer God makes. In his letter to the Romans today, Paul writes, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore 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.* This is not namby-pamby, feel-good spirituality. Our old self has been crucified with Christ, Paul says, so that we might be radically changed, so that we can live a new life. And, of course, this just follows the teaching of Jesus himself, who offers us nothing less than transformation: *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* Old self and new life; death and resurrection: there's just no mistaking the message. God's not really interested in tweaking us here and there, and making some minor adjustments: God has much bigger plans for us than that.

And those plans involve dying to sin itself. Sin is one of those religious words that we often distance ourselves from. We either trivialize it — that chocolate cake was sinfully delicious — or we see it only in extreme terms — mass murder, genocide. But whether the outward manifestations are horrendous or petty, sin itself is a chronic condition: separation from God. Jesus died to sin and lived a life in full communion with his Father. He also died to take away our sin, to remove all that separates us from God, so that we, too, could share in that full communion. After all, we're made for that, made to live in loving relationship with the Source and Creator of all life. In fact, God is closer to us than the air we breathe, closer to us than we are to ourselves, though our sin so often precludes us from fully experiencing and enjoying that. So Paul's words hit home: *The death [Christ] died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Now, ideally, we are all in the process of doing just that. But in case we have been sidetracked, in case we've forgotten why we're here, imagine how our life would change if we took this message more to heart. Imagine what we would be like if we let ourselves be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. We would not be crippled by fear, anxiety, and anger; we would meet each day with genuine gratitude; we wouldn't waste precious energy and resources on things that just don't matter; we would use our unique talents and temperaments in ways that would delight God and us; we would love easily and forgive readily; we would desire goodness and justice more than we crave material possessions and social standing; we would meet the inevitable difficulties of life with peace and hope; we would cherish the beauty in the world around us; we would discover what it really means to worship; we would overflow with the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus, an early Christian saint, said that "the glory of God is a human being fully alive." When Jesus talks about finding real life, he means just that, being fully alive.

He also says it will cost us, that we will share in his cross. New life is a gift from God, but dying to sin is a costly business. Some people will make fun of us and dislike us. We should never forget that in parts of the world today Christians are tortured and killed for their faith. But while we in Charlottesville may face moments of social awkwardness, probably our greatest challenge won't come from others, but from ourselves. Being fully alive in Christ will necessarily mean changing the way we are in the world. Say, for example, that you want to know the peace of Christ that passes understanding. That's a fruit of the Spirit, available to anyone who desires it. But if, like me, you set out to find it, you'll start paying a price right away. First of all, it will demand regular and frequent time spent in prayer and silence, time that we can't be doing other things. Then as we try to center ourselves and be still, we will come face to face with our resentments, our insecurities, our distractions, our greed, our lack of devotion. We will find that the only way to peace is to acknowledge these painful truths about ourselves and surrender them to Christ, seeking both forgiveness and help. We will need to do that not once, not twice, but over and over again. If we persevere, then slowly the Spirit will show us what it really means to trust, to live in a whole new way, to live close to God with Jesus. The process will be hard, and at times it will feel like dying, but it will make us more alive than we were before — and much more at peace.

That's just one example. You know where you most need transformation and new life. I just know that's its worth the price you'll pay for it. We come to church for inspiration and encouragement, so that we'll pay that price and live that Christ makes possible. Don't settle for 50 cents worth of God. The Lord has offered us so much more. In creation, on the cross, at the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, God gives himself fully so that we can be fully alive.