

This past week as I watched a video of a farmer pulling a 2-bottom plow with a Model B John Deere tractor circa 1948... I recalled the last team of horses on our NE Iowa family farm... and an old 1-bottom walk-behind plow that leaned up against one the corncribs on the farm. I recalled walking behind just one horse in our garden as he pulled the old spring-tooth harrow to prepare the soil for planting. I could only imagine how my grandfather felt as he bought his first tractor and a plow to turn over the soil... and no longer had to harness and maneuver a team to plow the fields. And I thought of how my Dad was amazed that his new German Deutz tractor could pull the new 5-bottom plow. Grandpa was also amazed. How times had changed!

I also recall going with grandma or mom down to the basement wash cellar to use the old wringer washing machine... and helping with hanging clothes and sheets on the lines between the house and woodshed... And how when Mom got her first automatic washing machine. WOW... what a time saver – it automatically washed, rinsed and spun the water out of the clothes... but though we still often hung things out side, when winter came the electric clothes dryer was a real joy – no more clothes racks inside.

Yes, many of us have experienced incredible changes in technology over the years! But that technology cannot actually come to life without someone bringing it to life. A washing machine has no life in it, no life of its own, no ability to act. It simply sits lifeless until someone puts a load of laundry in it, and then pushes its buttons.

Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians is concerned about another kind of lifelessness — spiritual lifelessness – that affects everyone at some point in their life. Paul takes it deeper – saying that this spiritual lifelessness is death — that ***we were dead in our trespasses***. And being spiritually dead, incapable of any action, any thought, any movement toward or away from anything. We can do nothing on our own to change our sinful nature...to make ourselves acceptable to God.

Paul writes, *Ephesians 2:4* ***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...*** Sounds a lot like today’s Gospel doesn’t it? *John 3:16* ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.***

The Gospel of John opens with... ***<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men.***

Later in John... *John 14:6* ***Jesus said to him [to Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** Jesus does not say

he is “a” way to God the Father. He clearly says his IS the only way...the only truth... and the only life. There is no other way to be a part of – to be alive in God’s eternal kingdom except through his Son, Jesus the Christ.

Because we cannot find and walk “the way” by ourselves... because we cannot know and speak “the Truth” by ourselves, because we cannot redeem our lives back to “the Life” – to a righteousness and acceptability to God on our own... God does it for us – through his Son, Jesus. Paul says: *Ephesians 2:8* **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** There are monuments to many who have died – touting their works and achievements, but those who are dead cannot speak of their works. The spiritually dead are lost in darkness and separation from God the Father; and they will have nothing to say of their works on The Last Day because their earthly works cannot redeem them. However, the spiritually alive have life because of God’s grace. Although their works hopefully reflect their life in Jesus, their works are not their way into eternal life – only a reflection of their love for Jesus and their desire to work for Jesus... *Ephesians 2:10* **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

Even though we are alive in Jesus, **the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience** continues to deceive and tempt believers with the **passions of our flesh** that they might give in to **the desires of the body and the mind**. Satan wants us to return to the land of the spiritually dead... by not living lives of repentance... by not living lives turned towards God... by not living lives in service of our neighbor. **The prince of the power of the air** works tirelessly to tempt and pull us away from our baptism, away from the promises we receive by grace... through Jesus’ precious blood that he shed on the cross for you and me on that fateful Friday... that we now refer to as Good Friday.

Yes, the father of lies... of sin and death roams the world stirring up doubt, fear and hatred... tempting all to just taste...just for a moment... just one time... enticing all to take their eyes off of Jesus just for a moment... as he entices with worldly pleasures... as he blinds those who follow him of what lies ahead on his path of darkness, sorrow, heartbreak, destruction, and ultimately eternal death. And lest we boast that we will never fall away from Jesus... others much closer to him said that...

*Matthew 26:20* **And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.**  
<sup>31</sup> **Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’**  
<sup>32</sup> **But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”** <sup>33</sup> **Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”** <sup>34</sup> **Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”** <sup>35</sup> **Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.** Jesus love is steadfast for us today.

Last Friday I joined with a family at the Dayton National Cemetery as they honored and said good bye to their Dad, Husband, Grandpa, Brother, Uncle, Friend... and together we read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm responsively ...

*The Lord is my Shepherd;*  
**I shall not want.**  
*He makes me to lie down in green pastures*  
**And leads me beside the still waters.**  
*He restores my soul;*  
**He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake**  
*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*  
*I shall fear no evil;*  
**For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**  
*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*  
**You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.**  
*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;*  
**And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

We'll revisit the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm on April 14<sup>th</sup> – the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

When we are in those deep valleys of darkness and unknowns... let us remember that God our heavenly Father is indeed rich in mercy...that his love for us is great... that his forgiveness is for you and me... and that he is the One and only One who raises those baptized in his Son, Jesus the Christ, to eternal life. His joy IS resurrection and life.

He blesses us with ears to hear his Words of Life... with a new heart to act on them, and with the newness of life to be able to live them out in Jesus... for no matter how dark the future may look from where you are today, by the grace of God you have the Light and Life of Jesus the Christ. Jesus IS the Life and Light of all his creation.  
*John 1:5* ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

We were rescued from spiritual death through the waters of baptism – receiving the very Light and Life of Jesus the Christ. Every time we commune at his table and hear his Words of Life spoken to us just as he spoke them to his disciples on the night in which he was betrayed before his crucifixion... we are counted as those rescued from spiritual death – counted as his beloved children who, though once dead in our trespasses, are now alive in Jesus the Christ! *John 3:16* ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life...<sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”***

In the book of Lamentations 3:22-24 we hear how, <sup>22</sup> ***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;*** <sup>23</sup> ***they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*** <sup>24</sup> ***The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.***

From our Old Testament reading today: *Numbers 21:8* **And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”<sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.**

One year ago today I rushed my beloved Sarah to the Wright Patterson AFB hospital, where she was admitted into the ICU with her vitals critical and going into total liver and kidney failure. The next day I would hear one of the doctors confess to me that he didn't know if she would make it through the night... she was so critically ill... Plans were begun for an emergency liver transplant with a team of doctors at the University of Cincinnati and at Wright Patterson choosing a last resort plan to keep her alive...

Without a doubt I believe God's gift of grace kept her spirit faithfully focused on Jesus – on his steadfast love and eternal hope that would baffle the doctors during the next 10 days as her body began its amazing – miraculous – recovery and climb out of the deep valley of darkness and near physical death... but never spiritual death for Jesus' promise of spiritual life is forever and ever!

You have this same eternal hope – eternal spiritual life – in Jesus the Christ because he IS the one who saves through grace alone... and we truly may boast of his grace, mercy and love through the words of Apostle Paul (Romans 8:31-35, 37-39):

**<sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

**<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

From today's Psalm 107...

<sup>1</sup>Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>2</sup>**Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble**

In spite of whatever the world may throw at you, keep your eyes and heart focused on Jesus the Christ. His love never fails – it endures forever! Amen.