

Not Dead, But Asleep

by Linda Rex

June 11, 2023, Proper 5 | After Pentecost—Have you ever noticed how there are times when the people you love and care for are the ones who hurt you the most? Think about Hosea, the prophet who was invited by the Lord to marry and care for a woman who was inevitably unfaithful to him, as a witness to his nation's repeated unfaithfulness to their covenant God. Deep in Hosea's prophetic word, though, we are given a taste of the underlying theme of death and resurrection: "He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him" (Hosea 6:2 NASB). Ultimately, the salvation of Hosea's nation was solely dependent upon the goodness and faithfulness of their covenant God, the One who would come himself to redeem and save his people.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, we see brought forth this same theme of our human need for redemption, and Jesus' descent into death, and his resurrection and ascension into glory, in order to raise us up into new life. In the gospel passage for this Sunday, Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26, Jesus engaged the religious leaders of his day in conversation regarding his relationships with those who were considered outcasts and sinners. He told these leaders, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. ... for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v. 12, 13b). His acceptance and calling of Matthew, the socially and religiously excluded tax collector was a case in point.

Jesus then went to a synagogue ruler's home where he found a group of people loudly mourning the death of a young girl. He told them that she wasn't dead, but was asleep. They scorned his hopeful assurance. After making the scoffers all leave, he and her parents entered the girl's room to see her laying lifeless in her bed. Jairus' daughter was beyond any human help. Nothing could be done anymore to save her. But then Jesus took her by the hand, and raised her up. This young girl had nothing to do with her healing and restoration to life. All she and her parents could do was respond in gratitude to the gift of new life which was given.

In the New Testament reading, Romans 4:13–25, the apostle Paul showed how Abraham and Sarah were given a promise of a son, but were powerless to bring the promise to pass. Abraham was too old and Sarah was incapable of bearing children. They believed, albeit faultily, that God would keep his word, but found themselves utterly dependent upon God's love and grace for it to be fulfilled. Like the little girl in the story who lay lifeless in her bed, due to their barrenness their dreams of holding a son in their arms lay lifeless and empty in their hearts.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he showed how Abraham did not receive his promised son because of anything he did, but simply because of his faith, because he trusted in the faithfulness of his loving God. It is God's goodness, God's love, and God's power which is important here. Abraham could only have hope because of the God of hope who had given him hope by giving him a promise—a promise God was well able and perfectly willing to keep. Abraham's participation in the process was simply faith—believing in the goodness and faithfulness of his God and trusting him to keep his word.

In the same way, we receive our salvation, our new life, not because we do everything exactly right or obey every law perfectly. Rather, we recognize that we are powerless and unable to do what is needed, that only God can bring something into existence from nothing, and only God can raise up to life what is dead and lifeless. All of us, like the little girl in the story and like Abraham and Sarah facing their inability to have a child, are unable to save ourselves or restore our relationship with God on our own. But the Son of God came, took on our human flesh, to live our life, die our death, and rise again, so that we could have what we otherwise could not

More devotionals may be found at <https://lifeinthetrinity.blog>

Subscribe to Our Life in the Trinity YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@ourlifeinthetrinity>

Would you like to participate in a Zoom scripture study? Email me at ourlifeinthetrinity@gmail.com

have—eternal life, life in face-to-face union with Father, Son, and Spirit, right relationship with God and one another.

When it comes to situations and relationships where there seems to be no hope, no life, no expectation of deliverance, we need to turn to Jesus. When it seems that the church today is dying and nothing we can do seems to be able to lift it out of that place, we need to turn to Jesus. When we are facing death and sickness in any form, we need to turn to Jesus. For he has entered and will enter into our place of residence here on earth, to take us by the hand, having become flesh like us and died as we die, in order to raise us up. God's promise to us is sure—we see it fulfilled in Jesus. He calls us to trust him, to believe—to allow him to be the God he is, the One who is faithful, loving, and good, and who has and will heal us, reconcile us, restore us and bring us safely home.

It is significant that the sacraments which we practice in the church today point us to death and resurrection. Through baptism (a one-time event) and communion (an ongoing practice), we participate anew with Christ in his death and resurrection, being reminded both of our need for healing, rescue and deliverance, and of our gratitude for his finished work in our place and on our behalf. Together, as we are gathered at the table, we eat and drink anew of the divine gift, with humility, gratitude and praise. We celebrate the goodness, faithfulness, and love of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

Holy God, thank you for your faithfulness, your goodness, and your love, expressed to us in the gift of your Son and your Spirit. Today, we see so many places where death, sin, and Satan seem to have the upper hand. We have no hope or life apart from you. Lord Jesus, turn us back to you. and by your heavenly Spirit, restore our faith. Fill our hearts and lives with your hope and love. In your name we pray, amen.

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’ But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Romans 4:13–25 ESV

More devotionals may be found at <https://lifeinthetrinity.blog>

Subscribe to Our Life in the Trinity YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@ourlifeinthetrinity>

Would you like to participate in a Zoom scripture study? Email me at ourlifeinthetrinity@gmail.com