

Our New Life Story

by Linda Rex

May 14, 2023, 6th Sunday in Easter/Resurrection—Do you have a story to tell? The story I have in mind is the story of your death and resurrection in Jesus Christ. Have you ever thought about that time in your life when you were facing the end of your old life and Jesus offered you a new one? Is this what he is doing for you right now?

In our New Testament passage for this Sunday, 1 Peter 3:13-22, the apostle Peter talked about how important it is for us to know our story and to tell it. It's important to understand that, even though we may not yet fully realize it, we died with Christ in his crucifixion and rose with him in his resurrection. Jesus, who was just, died for the unjust; he, the sinless one, died for all of us sinners. He rose from the grave, bringing our human flesh with him into the presence of his Father, enabling us to participate in his own close fellowship with his Abba in the Spirit.

Peter explains that our acknowledgement of this reality, our surrender to the will and purposes of God, is expressed through baptism. Just as Noah and his family left behind their old life to enter into the ark and be "baptized" by the waters of the flood and then to enter into a new life following the flood, we express our story, the transition in our own life, through baptism.

Part of our expression of our story through baptism is our coming to recognize and admit the truth of our existence—that we are heading the wrong direction, away from God, and Jesus has turned us around and brought us home. We confess that indeed, we are sinners in need of forgiveness and reconciliation, and we receive the forgiveness and reconciliation offered to us in Jesus Christ.

We commit ourselves to following our Lord Jesus Christ, no matter the cost to ourselves. It is important to realize that there is a cost—there is no guarantee that we will never suffer. And Jesus is Lord of all—that means he gets to tell us what it means to be truly human. He's the one who establishes our true identity as beloved children of our Father. Part of our growing up in Christ and living out the truth of who we are in Jesus involves following our Savior all the way, even into death and resurrection, for he told his followers to lay down their lives, pick up their cross and follow him. There will be sorrow and there will be joy—it is a relationship and a journey, and we find our endurance in Jesus' other gift.

Before he left his disciples, Jesus told them that he was not going to leave them as orphans, that he would come to them in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-21). The Spirit is our closest companion, kinsman, and true soul mate, for the Spirit dwells within, enabling us to know that we are in Christ, who is in his Father and in us. There is this amazing relational thing going on we are placed into and are able to experience because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, enabling us to know we are God's children and to hear his guidance and direction throughout our lives.

When we suffer because we are trying to follow Christ and do the right thing, Peter tells us to remember Jesus' suffering for our sakes. Remember that he did nothing wrong, he only did what was good, loving, and holy, and he suffered and died at the hands of human beings. But this event was not a shock to God—no, it was always God's will that every one of us be included in God's life and love as his adopted children. So, even in Jesus' life, suffering was part of God's will for him, not because the Father inflicted suffering upon him, but because the Father and Jesus knew in the Spirit what we would do when the Son of God came to earth. And they

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embraced suffering, rather than avoiding it. They took the suffering of Jesus and turned it into our salvation.

And you and I are a part of that story. We have our own story to tell—and someday, when the time is right, we will be given the opportunity to tell our story. And in telling our story, perhaps someone else will find themselves in the midst of God’s story too. So why not give it some thought right now? What is your story?

Thank you, dear God—Father, Son, and Spirit—for all you have done so that I might be included in your life and love. Immerse me anew in Christ, that I may glorify our Father, and live in obedience to his will, no matter the cost to myself. And Holy Spirit, give me opportunities to tell my story, and the boldness, wisdom, and faith to do so when the time is right, through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

“Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. ‘And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,’ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.” 1 Peter 3:13–22 NASB

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