

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 17, 2013

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God who gives us life.

What does it mean to live? This is the season for intense advertising. They will tell us what it means to live. What we need--to live well. What we need--to be impressive people. Oh, we don't believe that what they tell us is true, in fact, we might even poke fun at the big deals they make about small deal stuff—as if it will actually change our lives at all after we've had it for 3 months.

Yet sometimes their effect is subtle, we believe some of what they tell us. We want to believe their stuff will make us happy. That's because we just want that “at home, safe” feeling whether it's at home, in a crowd, in a hospital bed, or driving down the road.

What does it mean to live? . . . Physical...emotional...spiritual. The saints redefine what it means to live beyond eating, breathing, even beyond healing from our ailments and soul diseases. Beyond our working and feeling good about our work, play, and status. The saints define life by Spirit.

A life defined by Spirit is a life lived beyond ourselves. Caring about stranger, neighbor, friends and loved ones. As suggested by the reading today, we gain our souls by living beyond ourselves. There we find our souls. We lose our overwhelming fear of loss, death, and “not enough.” We overcome, not by beating out the opposition, but by redefining what it means to live.

A healthy spirit life is grounded in creation. Which is granted by the Creator God. When we are grounded, there is no nothing from which to run. There is no fear which need drive us from faithfulness. Being grounded will not make us perfect, but it will fill our choices with wisdom's mercy. Grounded in Spirit, the sun rises with healing in its wings.

Today Jesus speaks of faith in apocalyptic terms when he suggests that some will be put to death for faithfulness. . .but not a hair of your head will perish.

Now there's a mystery and a profound truth. Did you hear what he said? “Some will be put to death for their faithfulness. . .but not a hair of your head will perish.” Kind of makes us stop and think. Our first reaction of course is “How can you be put to death without being harmed?”

What kind of life is there that escapes death?

Is he talking about an otherworldly, angelic heaven? Many find hope and courage in looking forward to a personal life after death. There are a number Scripture passages which speak of the eternal reign of God and they often speak of it in terms of a spiritual earth or heaven.

But others have a difficult time believing that something so otherworldly, so different from our natural experience could be. For these, the same Scriptures are interpreted mystically, as a metaphor, as a post in the ground which invites us to accept that there is a real life beyond breathing and eating and all. That there is a life of which we have just experienced the beginning—the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, and we are not able to visualize it. But it is very, very real...and we take it by faith.

Either way, our faith is a mystical union with the divine. Union with all there is. With love, with peace, with grace, with mercy's judgment—life's eternity is a continuation of all the seeds we have planted during the course of our lives. Even errors, greed, fear are folded in as well for the sake of mercy.

Here is another mystery. Sin is absorbed by the infinite vastness of love. God's grace takes seriously the brokenness of our lives and our blindness, and grace wins out every time.

See how being grounded in the Spirit of life—faith in the final goodness of God—transforms our existence and brings peace?

No, I am not saying this is easy, but I am saying this is the only way to be well now, and in the future. Regardless of our take on eternity it is hard to visualize as we stand upon the earth with Job and Malachi, waiting for the sun of righteousness to rise with healing in its wings. We wait, we hope, we stagger forward, blindly at times, in great pain and uncertainty, but we place our faith in love of the other, the Spirit, the neighbor. None of it can be about us and our personal salvation and need to conquer.

With the writer of 2 Thessalonians I echo that those who invest in this spiritual grounding will reap a harvest in this life and for life to come. There is always time to invest in our faith and to practice trust.

We practice as we pray. As we listen to the Spirit. As we are still, waiting for God. We practice trust as we make faithful decisions. When we apply our abilities. No matter how often we must start over again. And again. And again. Our life is sealed with the mercy of God in eternity and we can rest in that. Amen.