



This may not be the best thing to say as a pastor, but for the longest time growing up, I did not pay any attention whatsoever to what was called the liturgy. Now, I was impressed when the guy in the white robe up-front could chant on his own, without any help from the organist. But, the only thing I really noticed beyond that, was it appeared that every single worship started the exact same way with that persistent Confession & Forgiveness wording week after week after week: “we confess that we are in **bondage** to sin and cannot free ourselves,” and on and on it went. I’m sure, every once in a while, I actually said those words printed

in the green *Lutheran Book of Worship* hymnal, but I didn’t really ponder their collective meaning. Quite honestly, I’m not really sure I wanted to, then.

It wasn’t until this interim pastor came along; those interim pastors who always insist on trying new things, of course. And so, something else was spoken for the first time in my memory, at least, at the beginning of a worship. It was this novel Thanksgiving for Baptism, using the very words we heard from the second reading this morning. But it wasn’t just the fact of a total change-up to professional Lutheran liturgy; the interim pastor had this Richard Dreyfuss kind of voice to him (the actor famous for *Mr. Holland’s Opus*, among plenty of other film and television productions).

I can still remember the timbre to his voice, and the pitch inflection when he got to the line: “The death he 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.” His intentional tone made it as if he wanted those words to stick to our core; as if what he was telling us was the very power of the transformational Gospel itself. With all due respect to the incredibly talented professional liturgists who put the *LBW* together back in the late 1970s, *these* words made it feel as if that “bondage” had been completely shattered. The change-up, in my mind, at least, turned out to be a good thing, even for us die-hard anti-change-at-all-costs Lutherans.

Now, it is quite possible that I was just more okay with change in general, because, at that time, my life was going through a decent amount of alterations, in a sense. Looking back, it doesn’t seem like that big of a deal now in comparison to the current state of drastic maneuvering our humanity has had to endure in recent months; but, as I was turning 20, I didn’t really think about such matters of humanity affecting the world beyond me. For starters, moving into a house on a college campus, I would have to learn how to do laundry on a consistent basis, not to mention how to cook for myself, pay bills, all that adulting nonsense.

However, it really was not about laundromats or ovens or financial stability: it was the fact that life was not going to be the same anymore. The days of all my siblings sitting together around the family dinner table with my parents, were gone. The Friday nights gathering up with my friends in my parents’ basement after playing in the marching band earlier that evening, were gone. The holiday celebrations with my immediate family, and all four grandparents in the same living room, had already started to fade away. Change, whether I liked it or not, was happening at an absolutely frantic pace.

So, yes, maybe my mind, my heart, my spirituality even, was already accustomed to the reality of a changing world. Maybe my whole being was primed and even eager to hear something different from the church, too, that seemed to start off with the same not overly pleasant news of being in

complete and utter bondage to sin with no hope at all of escaping. I doubt that's what the professional Lutheran liturgists intended, but that's just how it stuck in my memory, because that evocative imagery at the start was far more powerful than the words of the forgiveness immediately thereafter. I was more than ready to hear something different from the church, from God, in fact. I wanted to hear an even more powerful and completely life-altering Gospel.

And so here comes this interim pastor dead-set on changing things up, but to only enforce the same Gospel that was proclaimed long, long before. In his Richard Dreyfuss-esque voice: "The death he 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." That was not just Good News to hear; that was incredible news: that, amidst all the changes of life, I, and the world, were alive to God in Christ Jesus, because that Risen Christ already deemed it so for all of us.

It very well feels as if we have had to die to so much in recent months: die to in-person public worship in the same physical sanctuary, die to walking around in public at all without a mask on, die to not having to worry about a cough or a sneeze, die to not have to look at latest confirmed cases counts or death tolls, die to, quite frankly, any sense of normalcy that we thoroughly cherished more than we could ever possibly realize. Lose it all completely, whether we like or not: a most drastic change-up was undeniably thrust upon our daily living. Except, it is in those very downward spirals of our life, where these powerful Gospel words are thrust upon us by God in a Resurrection that unleashed a complete re-altering of the entire universe.

That no matter how we gather, no matter where we worship, no matter where we are on the human emotion spectrum reacting to all the changes we never gave permission for to happen at all; no matter what, these Gospel words are meant just as much for us now as ever before. Because whatever death attempts to unleash upon us in this life, we are already alive in Christ Jesus. No matter what happens, no matter how it happens, no matter how long it tries to define our existence, the Resurrection reality applies even more: anything that attempts to separate us from God in every single moment of this life, has been and always will be completely shattered by the death-conquering God. We are already alive because our still-Risen Christ has deemed it so for us and for the whole world. And for that Greatest News that can still never be taken away from us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!