

September 20, 2020  
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Isaiah 55:6-9, Phil. 1:12-14, 19-30, Matthew 20:1-16

**"A win/win Situation"**

A woman named Carol is diagnosed as having MS in her 30's after the birth of her son. For 30 plus years, Carol suffers loss of strength and motor skills. She wears diapers and drives a scooter.

A medical lift has to be used to take her from her scooter to sit in a chair in her living room. Her speech is garbled. Her husband divorces her and he dies. She does not have a close relationship with her two children. Many would say, "A wasted life". But Carol would say, "Because of this, I rejoice!"

What? A little 7 year old girl named Ryanna is struck down with an aggressive leukemia. She undergoes intensive chemotherapy. Shortly after her first batch of chemotherapy, she develops a severe pain in her stomach area.

It turns out to be a serious infection. She is helicoptered from her local hospital to the University hospital, and spends weeks in intensive care fighting for life.

Her parents are devastated to think about the loss of their child. And yet, Mark and Stephanie are able to say, "Because of this, I rejoice. What? Both of these stories are true stories from a pastor's 23 year old ministry in Michigan.

How can these two stories have people that are so upbeat and positive? How can these people have a heart painted with joy? I mean, I want some of that joy. You can. It all depends on your perspective toward life, and what your real purpose for being here is.

You see, for a Christian, life and death is always a win/win proposition for whether we live or die, we win. If we live, no matter what the circumstance, we live to glorify Jesus Christ with our lives, to serve Him, and spread the good news message that He is our Savior and Lord.

And when we die, we go through the portal of death to a life in heaven. So let's plug in a new focus today about life and death. As Christians, lift your chin up today, and smile, we are in "A win/win Situation!"

The Christians in Philippi must have wondered what was going on. The apostle Paul was locked up in prison, they had no idea if Paul would survive or not. What's worse they wondered how this would all affect them.

The apostle was in prison facing the possibility of a death penalty. Would people even bother listening to the gospel if their best-known and most eloquent supporter – St. Paul – was a prisoner of the state?

It seemed that the Christian church was on the "outs". But Paul tells them, "Because of this situation, I rejoice!" The truth is that Paul's imprisonment actually became a tool in God's hands.

God worked through Paul's stay in Rome to advance the gospel. The Palace Guard was specifically assigned to guard Paul. This was a detachment of elite imperial troops. They served as the emperor's bodyguard.

As Paul awaited his trial in Rome, he became acquainted with many of the soldiers of the palace guard. These soldiers began to realize that Paul was no ordinary prisoner, and certainly not a criminal.

It became clear that Paul was simply a prisoner because of his connection to Jesus Christ. His only crime was that he proclaimed the gospel.

The guard members spoke about Paul's case with each other, with their families, and with others in Rome. As a result, the gospel of Christ was being shared. Paul's case became "front page news." It was the talk of Rome.

Paul realized something as he sat in prison. He could have felt sorry for himself, doubted God's love and guidance, or he could take advantage of the opportunity to make a friend and share the name of Jesus.

Paul trusted that the Lord would provide for all of his needs in life. He knew that all things would work together for good. The apostle Paul lists another reason he could be so upbeat and positive, even in the face of uncertainty and danger:

“For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Did you catch the reason? Paul admits that his confidence and boldness was the result of the Philippians who prayed for him. They prayed that God would give Paul the strength and boldness to take advantage of opportunity to share Jesus, even though he was in chains.

The reason they prayed was because they trusted the Holy Spirit would give Paul the words needed to share the name of Jesus with those who imprisoned him. The Spirit was using Paul to glorify Christ.

It's fairly certain that you won't ever be thrown in prison because you're a Christian, but God promises that everything you face will turn out for your deliverance.

Your situation will provide an opportunity to glorify Christ your Savior. Your situation will provide opportunities to share your faith in Christ with others. Your situation will provide you with an opportunity to deepen your relationship with the Lord in His Word. Your situation will be an opportunity to develop greater patience and dependence on God.

That means the Lord might allow you to be placed in an unsavory place to accomplish his goal. He might put you in a position after a hurricane, where you might talk with a neighbor or friend who needs the hope of Christ.

He might put you in the hospital because a nurse, a doctor, or a fellow-patient could benefit from your confidence in Jesus as your Savior. The Lord might put you in a volunteer position where a fellow volunteer loudly proclaims his anger at God, just so you have an opportunity to give a reason for the hope you have.

For Me to Live is Christ. How well are we living that motto? For the most part I think we Christians treat life like it's one big airport waiting lounge. Ever take a good look around you while waiting for your flight? What's everyone doing?

They're checking texts, reading the paper, talking on their cell...they're each doing their own thing while killing time and waiting for the plane to show up so they can go elsewhere, as if that departure lounge is just a place to be endured.

Isn't it easy to see life that way as a Christian – like we're just killing time here waiting for Jesus to take us to heaven? Sure, we've taught Sunday School. We've served on church committees. We've raised our children and our grandchildren.

What's there left to do but go to heaven? Well if you're still here, it means that Christ has more for you to do. Paul explains what that is in the chapter after our text:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Living for Christ means actively looking out for the interests of others and putting their needs first. That's hardly the airport lounge mentality is it where you could care less what the person sitting next to you is doing?

But that's not the kind of attitude God wants you to have. He wants you to take notice of others. Are they down? Encourage them! Pray for them! Write them a card, even a quick email.

It can mean so much – not just for the other person but for you too as it gives your life a purpose. This is the benefit of living for Christ. St. Paul wasn't sure what would happen whether he would be released from prison or put to death. Yet, that didn't matter. God would deliver him.

Paul knew he was a new creation by God's grace. In baptism he had put on Christ. He lived every day in the knowledge of forgiveness – his sins were covered with Jesus' blood.

St. Paul drew his strength for daily living from Christ Jesus. His constant desire was to know Jesus more deeply and to serve him more completely.

Someone once made this comment about life. If for me to live is money – then to die is loss. If for me to live is self – then to die is loss. If for me to live is ambition – then to die is loss. If for me to live is sin – then to die is loss. But if for me to live is Christ – to die is gain.

Yes for a Christian, death is a gain. So what do we gain? First of all, we gain eternal life, never again having to experience death. It says in Revelation, “God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying or pain, because the old order of things has passed away.”

Did you catch the first “no more”? There will be no more death. Can you imagine a world with no more death, only life? If you can, you can imagine heaven. What have you done today to avoid death? Likely a lot.

You’ve popped pills, did some exercise, perhaps even passed on the pie and pursued polyunsaturated. Why? Because you are worried about staying alive. That won’t be a worry in heaven. In fact, you won’t be worrying at all.

Some of you may worry about terrorist and the future of the world. You won’t worry about that in heaven. Some of you worry about what’s next on covid-19 especially as we enter the Fall and winter months. You won’t in heaven. We’ll be ceaselessly strong and virus free.

You travelers worry about the plane crashing. You won’t in heaven. Heaven has no planes that I know of. If it does, they don’t crash.

The second gain from death is righteousness. The word righteousness means simply to be in the right relationship with God. It is true that as Christians we are righteous right now.

When God the father looks at us for the sake of what his Son Jesus did for us, we are righteous in His sight. We are clothed with Christ and his Righteousness. We belong to Him. HE owns us.

But when we die, you might say the relationship will be made even righter. Our wardrobe will be complete. We will be crowned with righteousness. You see on this earth there is still something that prevents people from being rightly related to God.

What is that? That's right, sin. Heaven will be sin-free. Because of sin, the young are abused and the elderly forgotten. Because of sin, God is cursed and drugs are worshiped. Because of sin, the poor have less and the affluent want more.

Because of sin, babies have no daddies and husbands have no wives. But in heaven, sin will have no power, in fact sin will have no presence. There will be no sin.

Death is a gain too, because it means a new body for us when Jesus returns. The Bible says, "He will change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

A new and improved body. That is a gain. No exercise or diet needed. Still another gain is the family fellowship we will enjoy. All of us live in this world of a dissolving family circle.

Mother is gone – Father is gone, or a child is gone, or our beloved grandparents are gone, or a close friend is gone. But the circle is unbroken in heaven forever and ever.

Finally, we gain a better home. Earthly homes need new roofs, new windows, new siding, new plumbing, constant painting and wallpapering. Our home in heaven does not need any repairs. It is a mansion like none other.

In death, we are winners! So, whether we live or die, we are in a win/win situation. The sun won't always shine on our vacation. Our favorite sports team won't always win.

Yet, life is a time of fruitful labor for us. Opportunity after opportunity to give God glory in whatever we do. Opportunity to give witness of our faith to others.

Death too is great gain. So, don't fear the C Word. Our Lord either takes the cancer from us or takes us from the cancer. We are always winners in Christ. So then, "Stand firm then in one spirit". Stand firm in the face of conflict or adversity. Amen.