



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 2

June 19, 2022

Resuscitated Galatians 3:23—4:7

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

¹ I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, everything we *can* see and *can't* see. And we're told in His Holy Word that He also fashioned man – Adam – out of the dust of the ground, and then God the Holy Spirit breathed the breath of life into that lifeless lump of clay and man became a living being, perfectly formed in the image of God. We knew Him and His will perfectly, and were happy living in it. This was all God's doing. It wasn't millions of years of countless accidents and mutations, but a specific, loving act of our Creator. Nor did the lump of clay make itself come to life. It was totally God's work; He gave us life, *breathed* true life into us!

Why mention this today? Well, we're reminded today in our Epistle of the great change in us that has taken place through our baptism. In baptism, God has made us spiritually alive. He has breathed into us the breath of life, which, because of the sin we've all inherited, we had cast off and thrown away, causing us to be spiritually lifeless and dead by nature. As the Psalmist David put it: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:3-5). Because of that sin, we were cut off from the only source of life there is: our Creator. To know Him and be with Him is to have true life; to be cut off from Him is death. (Just look at the wandering souls



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of this world, those consumed with its emptiness and shallowness. So many today are trying so many different things and being with so many different people in the hope of filling that hole in their soul, that sense of needing meaning and purpose, of being fed and filled, but who are trying to fill that hole with everything and everyone except the *only* One who can really fill the void, that hole we created when we rebelled against our Creator.)

And make no mistake about it. We were truly, totally, completely dead, spiritual corpses. We had no redeeming value, no ability to help ourselves. We were dead with stone-cold, lifeless hearts and without hope. What, after all, can a corpse do? It can't better itself. It can't resist temptation. It can't choose or decide anything. It can't please God. It can't make itself alive. It's dead. It can't *do* anything. We were as dead and lifeless as the lump of clay God held in His almighty hand on the day of our creation.

But, like that lump of clay, God has come to us and breathed new life into us! Though we *were* completely dead -- without any ability to raise ourselves, with nothing in us to make us worthy of life, with evil, sinful hearts, deserving of everlasting judgment and death -- God the Spirit was able to breathe new life into us!

Now, this wasn't easy; it came at the highest cost -- the blood of God's Son. Though God is gracious and merciful, He is also just and holy. The debt of our sin had to be paid. According to God's inscrutable wisdom, blood had to be shed to pay that debt. But, instead of demanding *our* blood, God gave His *own* blood in the person of His Son. Jesus shed His blood to pay for our sin. And then He rose from dead, conquering sin, death, and the devil for us, and proving once and for all that God the Father had accepted His payment for sin and credited it to us. That's what we celebrate every Easter, that Jesus' victorious resurrection from the dead proved that God the Father had accepted His payment for all our guilt and had forever removed the barrier of sin between God and man.

Jesus accomplished this forgiveness for all mankind, but it remains for each person individually to trust in His saving work. All who trust in the blood of Christ are covered by this forgiveness, can have a relationship with God again, and, therefore, receive the gift everlasting life. But God doesn't leave it up to us to manufacture such faith and trust on our own; He creates faith and trust in us by the power of His Spirit working through the Means of Grace.

This is what happened to you, beloved, in your baptism. In those gracious waters, according to the promise of God, your guilt and sin were washed away in the blood of Christ, and in that flood of life-giving Word and water, faith was instilled in your heart, and you were made alive in Christ. In that Sacrament, God the Holy Spirit used the Word of God to create faith in your heart to trust in the saving work of Jesus, and thereby applied His saving work to you. You were made alive! God the Holy Spirit breathed new life into your cold, stony, lifeless heart! Just like at creation, when He breathed life into Adam, so did He breathe new, *eternal* life into you at your *recreation* in Holy Baptism!

And notice that you had nothing to do with it! You had as little to do with your second birth as you had to do with your first one. You didn't go to your father and say, "Hi, Dad! Could you pay a little visit to Mom tonight, 'cause I'd really like to be born one of



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these days.” How could you? You weren’t alive yet! (Thanks, dads, by the way. Without you, none of us would be here today!) New life doesn’t create itself. It takes a father and a mother and God to bring a new life into the world. Without all three of these participants, a baby doesn’t happen. In fact, even fathers and mothers are instruments in the hands of God. Without God, no new life happens – not our physical one, and not our spiritual one. The psalmist David gives us a good reminder of this when he says: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” The Hebrew Word for create (*barah*), means to create something out of nothing, and is used only of God. Man crafts things, he makes things out of pre-existing matter – wood, stone, metal, and so on. Only God creates things out of nothing. In the beginning He created all things by the power of His own speech, and He created you in your mother’s womb, and He alone could create in you a brand new heart out of nothing. This is what He did on the day of your baptism. He made you alive in Christ.

We’re reminded of this each and every Lord’s Day, as we recall what God has done for us – literally raising us from the dead. But, since we still live in a fallen world, and still have the poison of original sin flowing within us, we might consider ourselves like those on life support. If you go into a critical care unit, chances are you’ll see someone on life support – someone who had perhaps been resuscitated and now requires a respirator or other equipment to keep him alive until he can fully recover.

Well you, too, dear friends, have been resuscitated – brought to life again in Christ – and you’re on life support together with all believers. We all depend on Him daily to keep us spiritually alive by His grace. It should be noted that, even though people are not capable of resuscitating themselves, they are capable of killing themselves, of pulling the plug on their respirator, cutting off their breath and dying. Spiritually, too, we can “pull the plug,” so to speak, cut our air and food supply, and slowly snuff out our spiritual life. By staying away from church, where God has promised to come to us and feed us with His faith-strengthening Word and Sacraments, we’re cutting ourselves off from the very means that God the Holy Spirit uses to maintain faith within us – and in a sense we’re cutting ourselves off from our air supply, the breath of life that God provides through His Means of Grace. All that is left to us then is the poisoned air of this fallen world.

No one should ever think that, because they’ve been Confirmed, they’ve come to the end of their study of the Bible. There’s only one graduation exercise for the school of Christ . . . it’s called heaven. We never get to the point in this life where we no longer need to come to the services in God’s House, or that we no longer need to spend time in God’s Word and prayer. And it’s not just the newly Confirmed who struggle with this. All Christians struggle with the lie that they’ve already learned enough. Sadly, by staying away, they’re pulling the plug on their respirator, pulling themselves away from the only true breath of life there is. Not a good thing to do!

Here in God’s House, beloved, He has promised to feed you and give you the breath of life. God grant us all the inclination and desire to continue to come here and receive His life giving breath. And may we strive to “plug in” when we’re not here, by daily



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accessing God's Word, for He desires to breathe life into us every day. As we recall our baptism, He continues to drown and kill the old Adam and to raise up the new. Each day, as we continue in His Word, and as week-by-week we come into His presence, Jesus comes to us and breathes His Spirit into us through His Word and Supper.

As you prepare to partake of His true Body and Blood, know with certainty that He is washing away your guilt and breathing new life into you, and that you are plugged-in to your life support, the true Breath of Life: Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen