

Romans 8:6-11 N.T. 147 (NRSV)

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Romans 8:6-11 N.T. Page 147
“The Life in You”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Holy God be among our virtual gathering today and whisper into our souls your life-sustaining Word. **Amen.**

Introduction: **In the last two weeks** life as we all have known it has been dramatically changed. **The kids have been** home from school for two weeks now and we don't know how many more weeks it will be before they can go back.

Some of us have been thrust into working from home trying to do jobs that were never intended to be done remotely. **Others of us**, like me, find ourselves still having to go into work but never knowing who we might cross paths with who's unknowingly going to infect us. **And here we are** for the second week in a row worshipping on-line. It's nice, but let's face it, it's just not the same. You can see me, but I can't see you. That's bad enough, but you also can't see the other people gathered with you in worship this morning. **Sure, we're all doing are best to** “keep calm and carry on,” but the permitted ways of carrying on feel so foreign to us. And we know at any moment our realities could be altered even more dramatically **if we or someone close to us is afflicted** by this dreaded pestilence.

I'm here this morning to remind each of you of some sacred words that were spoke to you before. ***“May the Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born of water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”*** Those were the words spoken as you emerged from the waters of baptism and God's Holy Spirit came to dwell within you. At all times, yes, even in trying times, **God's continuing presence** with each of us is a spiritual presence. **And it's God's Spirit** within us who's granting us wisdom and courage for the facing of these times. **God's Holy Spirit** is *“The Life in You.”*

PAUSE

Move I.

It's easy to be overcome by the wiles of the world. With so many kids and adults ordered to stay at home even as the weather outside is hinting at an early spring, many are suffering from cabin fever. **If you spend too much time** on Facebook or too much time watching 24/7 cable news you can get yourself all worked up in a tizzy. **It's kind of like chicken-little** who keeps running around shouting "*the sky is falling; the sky is falling.*" Yes, an acorn has fallen from a tree and has hit chicken-little on the head. But it's an acorn, not the sky. The trick in all of this remains to find balance. **You need to pay attention**—you can't be an **ostrich** with your head in the sand. **You need to pay attention** to what government officials are saying and complying with their directives. **But don't let yourself get caught up** with the pundits and self-proclaimed experts who love to speculate about things they know nothing more about than anyone else.

Let me read you just a couple of sentences from a letter our District Superintendent, the Rev. Dennis Swineford, sent to all of the pastors in our district this past Thursday: "*By now, you have all figured out that there is no playbook for leadership in a pandemic. We are relying on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the collective wisdom of our colleagues in the Body of Christ. ... Uncertainty is uncomfortable and haunting. It can wake us up at 3:00 in the morning and fill our minds with troubling thoughts. Yet it also allows us the choice of turning to God. James 1:5-6a (NIV) blesses us with an amazing promise and challenges us with a soul-searching condition. "If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But, let him ask in faith...!"* Let's be a people who pray. **Pray for our governmental leaders** and our public health officials. And yes, even pray for me, your pastor. **Pray that God will guild all of us** as we write the playbook as we go.

I've told you again and again, our guiding verse for this time is: **“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline”** (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT). The wisdom and power of God is available to all who ask in faith. Ask believing that God will provide.

Our Bible lesson today sets out a dualism between the flesh and the spiritual. **“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spiritual is life and peace”** (Romans 8:6, NRSV). When you find yourself becoming anxious; when you find yourself overwhelmed; pray! Pray for wisdom. Pray for courage. Pray for power. Pray for peace of mind. Connect with God's Holy Spirit who is less than a heartbeat away. **While the world** around us seems to be spinning out of control, **God's still very** much in control.

Let's step back for a moment to another time when our country found itself in the midst of a crisis. **That was on September 11, 2001.** That was before I had become a pastor, so I was at work at my company's headquarters in Homer City, Pennsylvania. **When we heard** that an airliner had crashed into the World Trade Center, we all gathered in the conference room and watched on TV. We saw the second plane crash into the second tower and then **watched in horror as the first of the two towers collapsed.** That's when I noticed one of our younger employees' slump in his chair and **begin to hyperventilate.** The events were just too overwhelming. So, I went over and took him by the arm and said, “let's get out of here and go for a walk.” We went outside and we talked, and once he was breathing normally again, **I encouraged him** to call his wife.

When it's feeling like the world is spinning out of control, step away from the TV—get off the Internet. **Take a walk.** Connect with family and friends. Pray. **Yes, it's easy to be overcome by the wiles of the world.**

End I.

Move II.

But those who are in Christ are overcoming this world. This pandemic is threatening to snuff out a slice of humanity. Fear and confusion are trying to cease the day. Some are claiming this is God's judgment. Others think this is the end. I see it as a test of faith. **Either you trust God, or you don't.** Either you believe be it in life or in death you are the Lord's, or you don't. **Let me read you** a verse from the heart of our Bible lesson today. This is **Romans 8:10 (NRSV), "But if Christ is in you, through the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."** Is Christ in you? Is the Spirit of the living God living within you? Then even if this pandemic ravishes your body, it cannot and will not touch your eternal soul. **"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul"** (Matthew 10:28a, NRSV).

As I mentioned last week, it's hard to sort fact from fiction. This past week any number of reputable news sources including CBS, the NY Times, and USA Today among many others **carried a story of a 72-year-old priests** in Italy who gave up his respirator to a younger man and subsequently died. It's a great story of an act of self-less love. It's a story that speaks of a saintly man's self-sacrificing character. But while the priest truly was a kind and godly man, the story has been embellished. The priest had had severe respiratory issues for a long time and used the respirator. When he contracted the new virus, his condition deteriorated quickly, and he was no longer able to tolerate the respirator and he simply refused to continue using it and subsequently died. The truth is the good priest never made a conscious decision to give up his respirator for anyone. I wish I could have told you the story was true, but I can't. It sounds good, and from what I have read about the character of the good priest, it was plausible. **But the truth has to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth** or else it isn't truth at all. **Remember Christ is the way, the truth, and the life** (John 14:6). And truth must be the whole truth.

I don't know about for the rest of you, but to me it seems like time has slowed down. **Schools here in Erie** have been officially closed for two weeks, but it seems like it's been a lot longer than that. **After that bars** were closed, and restaurants were limited to take out and delivery. **And now and all businesses are shuttered** except life-sustaining businesses. Hundreds of thousands of have been laid off and even more people are working from home. And now we're all under a "*stay-at-home order*." **There's only one** place to go from here. (*Wait for laugh*).

Those of you who have joined us on-line are worshipping from home. **But the handful of us here aren't**. What's up with that? It's simple the state recognizes religious institutions as "*life-sustaining*." At an on-line briefing of church leaders from across Pennsylvania the past Wednesday Dr. Rachel Levine, who is the Secretary of Health for Pennsylvania, actually encouraged churches to use streaming and teleconferencing for worship services. **I can't tell you** how long we're going to have restrict ourselves to on-line worship only, but those of us who are here leading this service today are committed for as long as the Lord is willing and keeps us healthy.

Today is the fifth Sunday in Lent. Lent is a time for penitence and somber reflection. Lent is a time to take up our cross and follow Jesus. **Lent is a time to look death squarely in the face** with the sure and certain of the resurrection of the dead to eternal life with God to infinity and beyond. **Ok that last bit was from Buzz Lightyear**, but that's what forever and ever means, it means to infinity and beyond. **Kings and kingdoms** are all gonna pass away. **But the Word of the Lord**, Jesus Christ will live on forever. "For the one who is in us is indeed greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). **This pandemic** has made the world an increasing hostile place. **But all thanks be to God, those who are in Christ are overcoming this world.**

End II.

Move III.

So, rest with God's Spirit that is "*The Life in You.*" Rest doesn't always come easy. The worries of the world can weigh heavy on our minds. So much of what's happening are things that are completely out of our ability to control. When will things ever get back to normal. We're tired. We're weary from worry. How can we possibly find rest for our souls?

Many years ago. Long before I became a pastor. Back when personal computers were finally becoming common, **I recorded a number** of Bible readings and posted them on the Internet. One of those recordings was of Jesus' famous **passage about worry** found in Matthew 6:25-33 (NIV). I recorded this way back in 1996. So, I've taken the old recording and did what I always do—I've added a few pictures and turned it into a guided meditation. So, wherever you are, make yourself comfortable. Lay your hands out palms up and in your lap. Now relax and let's listen together:

{**Play audio: "*Worry.mp3*" [1:24]**}

Did that succeed? **Did you manage to spend a few moments** without worrying? That's the power of God's Word. **It can calm** even storm-tossed seas.

We are in this world, but because of Jesus, we are no longer of this world. We are walking on this Lenten journey with Jesus. **We are walking** toward Jerusalem. **We are walking** toward the garden of Gethsemane. **We are walking** toward the judgment. **We are walking** toward Mount Calvary. **We are walking** toward the tomb. **We are walking** toward the resurrection. **We are walking** toward eternal life. **Ain't no** mountain high enough. **Ain't no** virus strong enough **to keep us away from our Savior's love.**

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As I've said before, Lent is a time to remember and reflect, but it's not a time to relive. We remember Jesus' journey to the cross and the tomb with the full knowledge that the Father's justice would not leave an innocent man to rot in his grave. **God raised Jesus from the dead** and God's gonna raise all who believe in Jesus from the dead too. **This is the last verse** of our Bible lesson today, **Romans 8:11 (NRSV), "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit that dwells in you."** The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son and from the Father enthroned in Heaven and comes and dwells in us. God's Presence with us is a spiritual presence. **Allow yourself to sense** God's presence. Allow yourself to feel God's love. Allow yourself to be filled with God's peace.

I want to wrap this message up with old familiar *camp song*. Imaging we're all sitting together around the campfire at Wesley Woods when someone starts singing "*One in the Spirit*" and everyone joins in:

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored:

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,

And all praise to Christ Jesus, God's only Son.

And all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one:

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We're a **people** who have a bright hope for tomorrow because the Spirit of the Living God is living inside each of us. **So, let's rest with God's Spirit that is "The Life in You"** and in me.

End III.

Conclusion: We've been worshiping on-line. You can see me, but I can't see, and you can't see each other. All because of a pesky little virus. **Yes, it's easy to be overcome by the wiles of the world.** Step away from the TV and get off the Internet. Take a walk, connect with family and friends, and pray. **But all thanks be to God, those who are in Christ are overcoming this world.** Don't fear those who can kill the body but not the soul. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. **So, go ahead and rest with God's Spirit that is "*The Life in You.*"** We are one in the Spirit so let's let the whole world know we are Christian by our love. The life in Jesus, is "*The Life in You*" and in me.

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. O God ease our fears and strengthen our faith. Our lives are in you Lord! **Amen!**

Sending Forth: Are you getting all worked up in a tizzy? Are you scared that you or a loved one might get sick and die? Then remember your baptism and your place in God's Kingdom. Go Forth assured that the Spirit of the Living God is "*The Life in You.*" **And all of God's people said...Amen!**