

SERMON - PASTOR GREG

10.3.24

4th Sunday in Lent. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *It is by grace we have been saved, and this not from ourselves- it is the gift of God.* Let us pray.

I was 36 years old before I saw a dead person. I had just become a pastor and was preparing for my first funeral. I went into the vestry and there was an open coffin with the deceased man in it. I stood there and looked and then touched him. Then the family came in and we prayed, closed the coffin and took it into the church for the funeral service. I know what a dead person looks like. I know what death is. So what do these words mean: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world?* The apostle Paul was writing a letter to a church in modern Turkey- Ephesus. He knew that church very well- he had spent three years preaching and teaching and watching God grow the congregation. They were obviously alive so how could he say: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins?*

The answer is in the following verses: *All of us... (were) gratifying the cravings and our sinful nature and flowing its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.* Wrath- the holy anger of the holy God- coming upon all people who seek their way and not His way. People, like you and me, who were seeking their own wants and desires. We all do it- it is part and parcel of our very nature- as it is- part and parcel of every human being. Seeking to go our way and not God's way. And this selfishness leads to temptation- to sinful actions and to death. But before our physical death there is our spiritual death. Sin separates us from God. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. We, like Adam and Eve, were created in God's holy image to be with Him- to listen to him- to speak with Him and to walk in the Garden with Him. But sin separates us from God. It is like a parent who has been bitterly betrayed by an own child- go away from me- you are as good as dead to me!

BUT! BUT! BUT! *Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved.* Two young children baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit- both born with sinful hearts but both born again of water and the Spirit. Not so for Paul. Not so for Peter, James or John. Not so for me. I was 31 before I became a Christian- before I was baptised. A sinner to be sure- but like some of you, like Paul and every other adult convert and like any infant- I was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. *There is no difference for all have fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:22).* And only through Christ Jesus.

And our response? *We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

And what are those good works? *To repent and believe in Christ Jesus now and forever.* Amen.