

The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

Genesis 50:15-21

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Love bought you. Blood paid for you in full. Blood paid for your life, blood paid for your death, blood paid for heaven's gates to open at the sound of your name.

You are not your own. Created – you were created. God's fingerprint is all over you. You mean something. The One who created you created you to mean something. Adam and Eve were the crown of God's creation – made in His image. Man was made to mean something... to Him. You mean something to your Creator. He is invested in you. God breathed into Adam the breath of life. God breathed into Adam His Spirit and Adam became a living being. Adam was not his own. Adam belonged to God. Adam was created in Christ. Adam was created holy. Being holy means something.

You are not your own. Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit, whom God has caused to live in you. When you were baptized, God's Spirit invaded your mortal flesh and you became a living being, a citizen of heaven, a reborn son the Most High, a recreated daughter of the living God. You are priceless in the Master's eyes – priceless. The blood of God's Son was poured out to claim you as God's prized possession. Christ's blood is priceless. God's love is priceless. The value of your life is priceless. You are not your own. You belong to God. You belong to the One who claimed you by dying on the Holy Cross.

You are not your own. You may feel empty inside. You may feel isolated and alone. You may feel abandoned, orphaned. You are not! Christ came into this world to be with *us*. That is most certainly true. Not for a season, not for one lifetime of drama, not merely for a select few who grew familiar with the timbre of His voice, the cadence of His walk, the rhythm of His speech. Christ is with *you*. You are never alone. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior'" (Isaiah 43:1-3).

Benjamin Whittier likely felt invincible. Twenty years old – vim, vigor, and vitality – a young lad full of life's savor. Benjamin was not his own – he too was bought, paid for by death and resurrection, purchased by the blood of the Son of God. Nothing could separate Ben from the love of Christ Jesus – not tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword (Romans 8:35). The One who created Ben claimed Him two thousand years ago when the sinless Savior mounted the arms of the cross and laid down His life. The blood of Christ washed over Benjamin as he was baptized in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. A new creation; the baptismal font at St. John Lutheran Church of Colton was heaven's womb. There, Ben was united to Christ, and Christ to Ben. This last Saturday, eight

days ago, this twenty-year-old lad met life as God has always intended life to be. Ben ventured through death, with the Lord Christ as His side, into life eternal.

St. Paul wrote this: “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:7-9). The moment that Ben died, he knew – in a way that goes beyond what you are I know presently – Ben knew that he was not his own. Ben couldn’t maintain his life – none of us can. We are afflicted, burdened – a virus has made our culture careen out of control. You are not master of your domain. Sin has wrought havoc on God’s creation. Sin brings calamity, distress of every sort imaginable, unwelcome loss. Sin brings death. This creation is broken. We are subject to forces that we cannot control. That is why Christ came. That is why God sent His priceless Son into this fallen world – to undo death (from the inside, to undo death by dying), to destroy sin (by bearing it, by taking all sin into His body, into His death, into His tomb), to break the tomb and deliver us from the peril that haunts our steps like a dragon. The Lord Christ came into this world to rise from the dead, to bring new life, to lead us to heaven.

Right there – when Ben died, Jesus was right there – as He has been all along, with us, allied to us. Life gripped Ben and that young lad knew – I am not my own, thanks be to God, I am not my own. Jesus sustains life. Christ and His empty tomb are invincible. What belongs to Him He gives to us by grace. In the face of death, Jesus *brings* life. “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Do you think that Jesus spoke those words tentatively, timidly, in some half-hearted manner? Do you believe that there was force in His voice that others recognized? Do you believe that the words that ushered from His mouth carried with them a noticeable power that gripped the hearts of those who heard? He spoke with divine authority. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

You are in His hand, His nail pierced hand. That hand gripped the cross to pay for your sins, that hand will pull you from your grave on the Last Day. You are in His hand now. Whatever this world throws at you, God is still achieving His purposes. God works all things together for good (Romans 8:28). Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9). Now, in this time, the church is to be strong and courageous. We are not our own. We cannot make it appear as though we live only for this life. We cannot love this world so much and the things of this world that we shrink from death. Be strong and courageous. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. That price tells you your value, it tells you of the Almighty’s steadfast love, it tells you what your future is. Be strong and courageous. God is with you. He is with you when fire surrounds your home. He is with you when the fabric of the country you love is being torn at the seams. He is with you when you must bury your son.

The strong and courageous forgive as we have been forgiven. The strong and courageous love as we have been loved. The strong and courageous serve as we have been served. Christians are, and ever have been, strong and courageous. We know that our sin has been atoned for and death

has no sting. We know that we are strangers here, pilgrims making our way home. We know that when life ends, we will be home. We know that when we are home, life as God has always intended fully begins. Easter makes us strong and courageous. Christ crucified makes us strong and courageous. Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper makes us strong and courageous. We are not our own. Christ died and lived again. Those who crucified Him meant it for evil but God meant it for good. And what a glorious good it is! Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. We belong to them – the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to the One, eternal God, we are not our own.