

7.27.2025 Trinity 6 (Romans 6:3-11)

The message of the Gospel is often presented as a rescue story. For example, when I was listening to the radio the other day I heard a pastor tell the story of John Harper, a Baptist preacher who was aboard the Titanic on that tragic April night in 1912. This pastor said that as the ship sank, Harper secured his family in the safety of a lifeboat, gave away his own lifejacket, and then began to preach the Gospel to those around him in the icy water. Harper didn't live through that night, but reports say that as he preached, he asked a man who was clinging to the wreckage, "Are you saved?" When the man replied no, Harper declared the words of Holy Scripture, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...*" (Acts 16:31). Years later, at a gathering of Titanic survivors, a man named George Henry Cavell identified himself as John Harper's last convert, for he'd heard the message of the Gospel in Harper's dying plea, and was rescued - saved from sin and death when he accepted Christ as His Savior.

The message of the Gospel is often presented as a rescue story - in sermons, in daily conversation, and in the Bible where we find numerous examples of the Gospel being presented in that way. Jesus told parables about lost sheep being rescued, lost coins being found, and lost children being reconciled to their Father, and our Lord said the reason He came was "*to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10), to search and to rescue the children of God from the attacks and snares of the devil. We were lost, blind, and without hope until God sent His Son on a rescue mission to bring us back into right relationship with Him. As St. Peter stated, Christ "*suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God*" (1 Peter 3:18).

The Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a rescue story, and yet in today's Epistle, it becomes clear that we have not only been rescued *from* slavery to sin and death, but have also been rescued *for* "*newness of life*" (Romans 6:4). In this passage, St. Paul speaks of Christian baptism as a dying and rising again - a death to the old life, the old way of being, and life to the new. In baptism our "old self" is crucified, dead, and buried with Christ, and as Paul states, we were buried *with* Him through baptism in order that "*just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*" (6:4 NIV), and the new life St. Paul speaks of is the

Risen life, the Resurrected Christian life - a life of humility, faith, and obedience to God's will through the grace and power of His Holy Spirit.

The Gospel message is a rescue story, however, God rescues us - He forgives our sins and saves us from hell not only that we may one day live with Him in heaven, but that we may live with Him, in Him, and for Him today. At the moment of our baptism we were not only saved, we were made children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, we received the Holy Spirit and were grafted into the body of Christ's Church. We were made Christians, and to be a Christian, by definition, is to be a "little Christ," and as a little Christ, to use the words of St. John, we "*ought to walk in the same way in which He walked*" (1 John 2:6).

Our Savior Christ rescued us, He tells us that He left this earth to prepare a place for us (John 14:3), and until the day He calls us home, all who call themselves Christians ought to walk in the same way He walked. *This* should be our greatest desire: to know Christ so personally, so intimately, that we walk as He walked, that we become like Him, and in becoming like Him, make Him known to the world He died to save, and while we may often look at ourselves and consider such a possibility hopeless, it is not. In fact, Scripture clearly tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in every Christian for that purpose - to make us like Christ.

In the book of Romans, we learn that God has predestined His people "*to be conformed to the image of His Son*" (Romans 8:29). From the beginning, God's purpose, His eternal will for His children is that we would become like Christ, and in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we discover God's eternal purpose is now being carried out in our lives. Writing to Christians, St. Paul states, "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness (the likeness of Christ), from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Spirit of God lives in you, His will, from the beginning, is for you to become like Christ, and it is by His power that you "*are being changed*" into that likeness. This Divine work of the Holy Spirit is happening in the life of every Christian who truly desires to be like our Lord, and what we recognize

in the beginning, that good work which we see happening now, will be brought to completion. St. John reveals that truth, he writes to us saying, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

These verses reveal the truth that God’s will from the beginning of time, His active purpose now, and His plan on the last day is for His children to become like His Son. This is the will of God for the people of God, and therefore the question becomes: Will you let God have His way with you? Will you agree with your Father and allow His Spirit to make you like His Son? Is your prayer *“Thy will be done,”* or is it my will be done?

The Gospel message is a rescue story, but we must not think that God’s plan is only to save us from hell, because our Father’s purpose is infinitely greater. God’s eternal will is to prepare us for heaven, to make us like Christ, a likeness that on our own we could never attain, but because the Spirit of God lives in us, we can *walk in the same way* Jesus walked. Archbishop William Temple illustrated that truth in this way. He used to say, “It is no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it—I can’t. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it—I can’t. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like this. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like His.”

We may not have access to the genius of Shakespeare, but Jesus made this promise to His disciples, He said, *“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you”* (John 14:16-17). To be like Christ is the Father’s will for His children, and we can *walk in the same way* Jesus walked, we can live a life like His, because the Spirit of God has come to live in us, to make us all that God intends us to be. Apart from God this is impossible, *“but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26).