

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

But God  
Fourth Sunday of Lent  
Ephesians 2:1-10

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation!  
**Thanks be to God for such great mercy.**

Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!  
**Thanks be to God for new beginnings!**

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation through Christ Jesus.  
**Together we will make a new beginning in Christ!**

Let us worship God with joyful hearts, trusting God to renew us and all things.  
**We will lift our praises to God with hearts refreshed by grace.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of Mystery and Mercy,  
we gather to worship you in humility and hope  
because we believe you have the power to change the world;  
to change the world for the better with your love.  
We gather to worship you  
trusting that no one or situation is beyond your concern,  
or your embrace.  
Such love astonishes us.  
Without your grace we cannot imagine such love.  
Inspire us with a vision of love  
which will change the world and our lives  
through the love and mercy we meet in Jesus Christ,  
your Son and our Saviour. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn: "If You are Happy and You Know It"

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

### **Prayer of Confession**

**God of love and mercy,  
when we pause for a moment in your presence,  
the daily details of our lives press in on us.  
We recall things left undone; opportunities ignored.  
We remember careless words spoken,  
disappointments that trouble our souls.  
We offer to you now our repentance for our misspent moments and missed  
opportunities. Amen.**

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Remember the promise that the apostle Paul declares:  
What can separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship? Distress? Peril or sword?  
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the God who loves us.  
Neither death nor life, things present nor things to come can separate us  
from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Thanks be to God for such a promise!  
The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Music Ministry: "Yes Lord" by Choir**

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **Psalm 107:17-21**

<sup>17</sup> Some were fools through their sinful ways,  
and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;

<sup>18</sup> **they loathed any kind of food,  
and they drew near to the gates of death.**

<sup>19</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.

<sup>20</sup> **He sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from their destruction.**

<sup>21</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!

<sup>22</sup> **And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,  
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!**

**Opening Hymn #485: “Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”**

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us;  
much we need your tender care;  
in your pleasant pastures feed us;  
for our use your folds prepare:  
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
you have bought us; yours we are.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
you have bought us, yours we are.

We are yours; in love befriend us;  
be the guardian of our way;  
keep your flock from sin, defend us;  
seek us when we go astray:  
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
hear your children when we pray.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
hear your children when we pray.

Let us always seek your favour;  
let us always do your will.  
Jesus Christ our only Saviour,  
with yourself our spirits fill:  
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
you have loved us; love us still.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
you have loved us; love us still.

**Prayer for illumination**

Almighty, gracious Father,  
the true understanding of your holy Word helps us to grow  
into the fulness of the salvation you so freely offer in Christ.  
Grant to all of us that our hearts, being freed from worldly affairs,  
may hear and grasp your holy Word with all diligence and faith,  
that we may rightly understand your gracious will,  
cherish it, and live by it with all earnestness, to your praise and honor.  
Through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

## Scripture

### Ephesians 2:1-10

**2** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

## Sermon

How many of you remember what it was like to be a baby? None? From the moment that you were born your parents were the ones to care for you and look after you. They fed you, clothed you and changed you many times a day. You did not do much in return. In fact, your life consisted of eating, sleeping, going to the bathroom, and crying. **A lot.**

Then after a few months you started to get some control of your head, as your neck muscles started to develop. Eventually there was a day that you could look around, which was followed by a time when you could lift yourself up and even roll over. Not long after that you learned to stand and then stumble a few steps.

Along the way you started to make sounds other than crying. At first it was just babbling and cooing, then a syllable of a word here and there.

Then before your parents knew what happened you were walking, talking, and getting into everything you could. You could repeat words, even though you had no idea what they meant. and when you found something interesting, if it fit in your hand it went into your mouth.

Eventually you went to school, you started to learn about math, science, social studies, art, music, and language. You got tested along the way to show you understood what you needed to and were performing at a normal level for your age.

This is a normal path of development for human beings, and we have set measurements of ability and social skill that we use to determine that someone is developing normally. The reality is that no one is born speaking their native language fluently and with the capability to do advanced mathematics. That would be abnormal.

In the Scripture that we are looking at today Paul is speaking about spiritual development and some of the ways that it takes place in our lives and to be very clear with you it can at times be very difficult to figure out what a normal pattern of spiritual development looks like.

This is because many different denominations and Christians have different views what a spiritually developed Christian is like.

There was a research group in the US that asked Christians, 'How important is your faith to you?'

9 out of 10 answered very important!

So, they asked those 9 out of 10, 'How you would rate your spiritual maturity?'

Most answer that they were above average in all areas of spiritual maturity. So, ask yourself the same two questions. 'How important is your faith to you?' and 'How you would rate your spiritual maturity?' as we look at how Paul describes spiritual development and spiritual maturing to the Ephesians.

This is a very complex topic and to keep it simple, we will only examine it at the broadest of levels. In the Scripture that we read, there are descriptions of four different kinds of people. Paul describes people who are wandering through life without God, people who are woken to a relationship with God, people who are watching for God, and finally people who are working with God in their lives.

Paul starts simply.

**Ephesians 2:1**

**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.**

Paul does not mince words; he wants people to understand this point of their lives clearly. In fact, this is perhaps one of the most critical components for understanding our spiritual development and maturity.

Each and every human being that walks upon this earth is born spiritually dead. Everyone is born a sinner, corrupted by the pollution of sin in our very nature. It is because of that sinful nature that we all do things that we know go against the will of God. And it is because of that nature that we are born separated from God into this world.

This is important for us to grasp because we have to learn to accept that we are sinners so that we can begin to understand what God did for us. Paul in writing this, used the Greek word NEKROS, a word which has only one specific meaning in the Greek language dead. Paul wanted us to know that we are not spiritually under the weather, or spiritually sick, or spiritually challenged, we are spiritually dead in the eyes of God.

To make it clear one of the most common analogies for coming to faith is that of the drowning man. A man is drowning and grasping to stay afloat in the water that represents the sin around him. Jesus comes along and all you have to do is reach up and be saved. Grasp the hand of salvation that is offered to you and salvation is yours.

There is one major problem with this analogy, the man is alive. Paul says we are dead.

To make this analogy work the man needs to be dead in the water, not struggling at the surface, but instead sunk down to the very bottom of the waters. Jesus needs to jump off the boat, swim down into the depths and drag our corpse back to the surface with him where he brings us back to life.

There is a significant difference in these two analogies and one that all Christians need to understand. People of the world who do not have faith are not sick or drowning in this world. They are dead, they lack the ability to respond to any form of spiritual stimulus, this is why no self-help course, or no therapist can do anything to change their nature in this world.

If someone who is spiritually dead goes to school to improve themselves, they simply become a well-educated sinner, if they got to a therapist, they become a well-adjusted sinner, and if they come to a church..... they become a religious sinner.

It is only when a person comes to Christ, when they repent and begin to obey his Word that they become a saved sinner.

We are born spiritually dead. This is why so many people cannot see the truth of the Scriptures, they are dead in the spirit until they are saved.

**1 Corinthians 2:14**

**<sup>14</sup>The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**

Those that are spiritually dead cannot know or understand anything about God, they believe that everything about God and religion is nothing but foolishness.

We should not be surprised by this, after all the same can be said about the physically dead in this world. You can speak to, yell at, poke, slap or even use a cattle prod on a human corpse and it will not respond at all to the things you do.

The same is true for the spiritually dead, there is no amount of poking, prodding, yelling, speaking or convincing that you can do that will have any effect or influence over them in this world.

On top of that you cannot make them less dead. There are no variations in the level of dead, there are no semi-dead people in this world, or as Monty Python would say mostly dead, but not all dead people.

Mankind is dead, drown in our sin and sitting at the bottom of the lake, and it is only God who can save us. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be born again. Jesus himself told us this.

### **John3:3-8**

**"<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'<sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

We need to be born again. Well, how many of us chose to be born the first time?

Not one of us chose to be born. None of us took part in the physical act which created us, none of us got to choose our parents. In fact, there is a lawsuit going on in the US right now where a child is suing their parents for forcing them to be born. This is the insanity of the sinful and dead world we live in.

The reality is that our spiritual birth is the same. God created our spiritual rebirth; God through the Holy Spirit brings us back to life.

This first line of the Scripture, '**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins**' carries a lot of weight in understanding our faith. Every human being who had lived, is living and will ever live, with the exception of Jesus Christ, is a sinner.

### **Ephesians 2:2**

**<sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—**

We walk around in this world, obedient to the ways of the world, living in our sinful nature. This is human nature, to move around in this world in pursuit of our own personal pleasure and for our own purposes, trying to win at the game of life. Wandering through life with no real understanding of the reality of eternity, wandering away from God and his call for us to be reborn spiritually.

This is the stage of spiritual maturity that those who are dead to God are eternally stuck at, and they are the ones that Christians will most often be at odds at, because of our different understanding of the world and God's place in our lives.

Paul is telling us this is where we all once were, but God came along and changed that for us. God changes us from wandering aimlessly into a person who is woke to God in this world.

**Ephesians 2:4-6**

**<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

Every Christian has a ‘but God’ story. This is our testimony, the day that something changed in our understanding of who we are and who God is on our lives. Even if you were born into a Christian family, you were born a sinner, and there has been or likely will be a ‘but God’ event in your life.

“Amazing Grace” describes this stage of faith perfectly. I was blind, but now I see. Every Christian was blindly wandering around in this world in pursuit of their own pleasure and happiness. Until the day that God opened our eyes, God wanted us to see the foolishness of pursuing the things of this world and the importance of pursuing the things of His kingdom. So, he woke us up from spiritual death and gave us spiritual life, he opened our blind eyes so that we could see.

Why did God do this? Why did he change the walk of life we were going through in this world?

Why was God willing to swim down to the bottom of the sin filled waters and drag us out and bring us back to life? **‘But God, being rich in mercy,’**

God saw us living in a state of brokenness, living in a state where we were subject to the ways of this world and not his ways, so he saves us. Why? **, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses,’**

God loves us, all of us, everyone of us, God loves all who are saved and all who are sinners. If you have read your Scriptures, you know that God loved us before any one of us even knew who He was.

**Romans 5:6-8**

**<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

God loved us even when we wandered around this world in pursuit of our own worldly goals. God loved us even when we hated Him, when we did not care to understand Him, when we did



not want to follow any of his laws. God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to be sacrificed upon a cross for us, even when we had done absolutely nothing to deserve his love or his sacrifice.

It is not until you realize what it means to be a sinner without God and have your eyes opened to the truth that you begin to appreciate what God has done. It is not until you are spiritually reborn, and your eyes opened that you could begin to understand just how much God loves all people.

God '**made us alive together with Christ**'. If you can remember back a few weeks, he quickened us. The Greek word is, **Soon-ez-o-poi-a-sen**, he restored us to spiritual life, reanimated us in the spirit, made us reborn.

How does he do this? How are people quickened?

For some they say that they had a sudden epiphany that God was real, for some it was an event in their life that caused them to understand the truth of God. God wakes us from being spiritually dead into spiritual life so that we can begin the next stage of spiritual growth in this world, a time of watching for God in our lives.

**Ephesians 2:7**

**<sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

In his writings Paul loves the expression 'in Christ'. He uses it to constantly remind the faithful that they are meant to be with Christ in the things they do in this world so that they can be with him in the kingdom of heaven. It is Paul's way of reminding us of eternal life, that God has saved us.

Once we are spiritually woken, we are raised from the dead, we now recognize that we are a child of God and begin to see the truth that this world is just a small part of the eternity that God has planned out for his people.

We begin to wonder about the fruitless pursuit of the things of this world and instead change our focus to the more important realities of what will happen after this world. We begin to read the Scriptures and get an understanding of the importance of our faith and of the events that will take place in the book of Revelation. We begin to look forward to the second coming of Christ, because it signifies our return to our eternal home in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 7 tells us that God loves us so much that it will take an eternity to show us all of his graces.

And if God loves us that much, we should love him in return with all that we are in this world. We should work with God to bring others to the truth of who he can be in their lives in this world.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

**<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his**

**workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

The reality is that we were all dead to God, wandering through life sinful and in pursuit of our own pleasures until he woke us through the Holy Spirit. After he quickened us, we were able to see his greatness and his glory and begin his work in our lives and the lives of those around us, we begin to pursue his Word and to desire to serve him in the world, because we know of the eternal life we are destined for in his kingdom.

God created us all, <sup>40</sup> **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** He created us for a purpose, each and every one of us, was personally created by God for a purpose.

The truth is we may not always feel that way, we all know that we fall short of God's perfection daily, if not hourly. We are God's work, God's creation and he is still at work in each of us, changing us from the person we are into the final creation that he has called us to be for all of eternity.

God created us, and on the day he spiritually woke us from the dead, his Holy Spirit entered us and began the long process of sanctifying us, helping us change from a sinner who is focused on winning in this world to a saint who is focused on God's eternal kingdom.

And one of the ways that God does this is by working through us in this world. When God uses us in this world to fulfill his plans, we begin to understand what it means to be fulfilled in this life. We begin to see that God is constantly at work in every one of his people. When we are strong and when we are weak, when we succeed and when we falter, God is constantly at work both in his people and through his people in this world.

God uses those people who he has saved, even with their flaws and failures, to reach out to the people who are still blind and wandering around lost in this world. He uses his people to do good works and bring glory to his name in a world which cannot understand him on its own.

When Paul came to faith on the road to Damascus, he asked God two questions.

The first was, **'Who are you Lord?'** Most of us have asked this question in our lives and many of us may even feel that we have an answer to this question in our lives. Many of us have accepted the truth of who God is, who Jesus is in our lives and that he alone is our Salvation. Jesus bought our lives through his sacrifice upon the cross and brought us back from death into life.

However, that second question that Paul asked upon that road is one that many of us are hesitant to ask, **'Lord what do you want me to do?'**

God has planned out good works for all of us, so that no matter what calling we have been called into, no matter what time, talent and treasure God has given to us, we can serve his kingdom.

So, where are you in your spiritual development? Wandering blindly in this world, a religious sinner? Woke to the truth of God and beginning to discover your faith? Watching for God in your life and the lives of others? Or are you ready to ask God, '**Lord what do you want me to do?**' and begin working with God to be the Salt and Light of his Word in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

**Preserve Us from Greed and the Cares of this Life**

Lord God, heavenly Father,  
 in the wilderness your Son fed over five thousand people  
 with five loaves and two fish.  
 Graciously remain with us and bless us.  
 Preserve us from greed and the cares of this life  
 that we may seek first your kingdom and your righteousness  
 and in all things remember your Fatherly goodness;  
 through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one true God, now and forever.

***Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Lent 4***

**Hymn: "Grace"**

Your grace that leads this sinner home from death to life forever,  
 And sings the song of righteousness by blood and not by merit.

Your grace that reaches far and wide to every tribe and nation,  
 Has called my heart to enter in the joy of Your salvation.

CHORUS

By grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored,  
 And now I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord.

Your grace that I cannot explain not by my earthly wisdom,  
 The Prince of life without a stain was traded for this sinner.

Chorus

Let praise rise up and overflow my song resound forever,  
 For grace will see me welcomed home to walk beside my Saviour.

Chorus

**Invitation to Offering****Offering****Offertory Prayer**

Creating God,  
 all good things come from you:  
 food and drink, joy, peace and hope,  
 forgiveness of sin, adoption as your children.  
 Through your Spirit nourish us with these gifts,  
 that we may be signs of your grace in the world.  
 With grateful hearts we offer our hearts and lives  
 to you, the giver of every good and perfect gift,  
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. **Amen.**

**Closing Hymn #683: "I Know Not Why Such Wondrous Grace"**

I know not why such wondrous grace  
 to me God has made known;  
 nor why, unworthy as I am,  
 Christ claimed me for his own,

Refrain:

but I know whom I have believed  
 and am persuaded that Christ is able  
 to keep that which I've committed  
 unto him against that day.

I know not why this saving faith  
 to me God did impart,  
 nor how believing in the word brought  
 peace into my heart. (Refrain)

I know not how the Spirit moves,  
 convincing me of sin,  
 revealing Jesus through the word,  
 creating faith in him. (Refrain)

**Pastoral Prayer**

All knowing God,  
 We give you thanks for all the things you provide that make life good and full:  
 For the rhythms of nature which water thirsty lands, producing food for all creatures;  
 For energy to work

and for community to share in the produce of work.  
 Yet we are still thirsty in this land of plenty:  
 thirsty for hope when work fails;  
 thirsty for love when friends fail;  
 thirsty for justice when sharing fails.

God light of the world  
 Thank you for the light you shine in a world filled with complexity  
 to bring hope and increase understanding:  
 Understanding to address human need and improve daily life;  
 Understanding to deepen relationships and mutual respect;  
 Understanding to tackle problems and seek solutions.  
 And so, we seek your light to lead us:  
 the light of wisdom to bring people of different perspectives together;  
 the light of courage to work for change in desperate situations;  
 the light of hope to persevere when change is difficult.

Loving Father  
 Thank you for the purpose and potential you create for us in Christ:  
 For creating friendships and neighbourhoods that support us,  
 For creating co-operation to accomplish goals that seemed impossible,  
 For creating gratitude for the gifts, we discover in each other.  
 And so, we seek the gifts of the Spirit we need in these challenging days:  
 The gift of confidence to renew our ministries in humility and hope,  
 The gift of generosity to renew lives in need around us,  
 The gift of faith to trust you for a future we cannot yet see ourselves.

God, The Good Shepherd of our Lives, we give you thanks that Jesus walks beside us and  
 leads us on the paths you set before us into the future and we pray that your light will  
 always shine on us and through us into the world.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

### **Benediction**

People of God, know this,  
 God our Father made you and guides your every step;  
 Jesus Christ gave his life for you and brings you new life;  
 the Spirit keeps you in the Lord's presence and empowers you to serve.  
 May almighty God continue to bless you and move you to give thanks. **Amen.**