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**1-Narrative – Easter 07
Romans 6:1-14**

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“Walking in Newness of Life”

*“...we have been buried with him by baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.” [Romans 6:4]*

That was easy for Paul to say.
All of his life Paul thought he was serving God –
even when he was rounding up Christians to torture them and hand them over to be put to death.
Even then he thought he was doing God’s will.

And then came the day when the risen Christ met him on the road to Damascus, blinded him and spoke to him,
and Paul’s whole world was turned upside down.
No longer was he persecuting Christians; he was one!
Even though he had thought he was serving God before, his life had been filled with fear & hate & judgment.
But after he met the risen Christ,
after he had had hands laid on him to heal him,
and after he had opened his heart to receive the Holy Spirit,
God had transformed his life, raising him from death so that he could live a whole new life.

Paul has an advantage over most of us.
He had an old life before he knew Christ; and then he had a new life after he met Christ.
An un-churched person who has fallen into drugs and alcohol and promiscuity and then come to faith
can easily talk about their old life and their new life.
But for those of us who were baptized as infants,
we don’t have any memory of that event or of our old life before,
so it’s hard to conceptualize what this old life and this new life are.

So what does it mean to walk in newness of life?
What is it that differentiates this new life in Christ from a non-Christian’s life?
Other than the fact that you attend worship, what sets your life apart from your neighbor’s?

How is it that we are to live?
What is it that we are to be doing?
How do we know what is the will of God?

One way is to simply ask.
We can pray for God to direct us and sometimes we will receive clear directions.
Maybe an angel will appear and tell us to go back to church and sing in the choir!
Maybe God will wake us up in the middle the night with an immediate solution
to a problem that has been plaguing us for months.
Maybe God will speak to us in our minds.
Maybe God will show us a vision of what is to be.
If we pray for a sign, most often God will provide one.

But what do we do if we don’t see an angel or don’t hear gods voice or don’t see a vision?
What do we do if we don’t get a clear sign?

Well, one thing's for sure: we don't just do what any rational, logical, non-Christian person would do. Because if we make our decisions like any non-Christian, then there is nothing that sets us apart, nothing that makes our lives different, nothing that demonstrates that we have been buried with Christ and raised with him to new life.

So how do we make decisions differently?

Let me suggest three guiding principles.

Whenever we have a choice between doing one thing and another,

it's usually the right choice, the loving choice, or the hard choice that allows us to walk in newness of life.

The first principle is to make the right choice, no matter what the cost.

There was a man who owned a factory and had all his assets tied up in it.

The business was struggling but he was getting by.

Then one day, due to a safety violation, there was an accident

and a young woman was hurt and suffered irreversible brain damage.

Her family sued the company, but due to a cover-up and a smart lawyer,

the family lost their lawsuit and the business was saved.

The owner, however, discovered the cover-up and decided that the woman deserved the money so he sold his business and gave the money to the woman.

He had spent his whole life building up this business

and now he was in his 70s and had nothing to show for it – no business, no savings, no retirement plan.

His children were outraged, his wife disappointed and scared.

And not knowing how he would provide for his wife and himself now, he was scared as well.

But he had done what was right – not what was prudent, but what was right – despite the cost.

The second guiding principle is to make the more loving choice, no matter what the cost.

My friend who is a therapist told me about a 50 year old man who had come to her, unhappy with his marriage.

He had married young – at age 19 – and had married the first girl he ever kissed,

primarily because he assumed he was in love and that's what he should do

and because his family and hers and his church also thought he should.

She was a good wife who cooked and cleaned and ironed his clothes,

and when they had children she was a conscientious mother.

But he never really bonded with her.

He loved puzzling over intellectual problems that she had no interest in.

He was physically affectionate by nature, but she didn't like to be touched.

He was gregarious & outgoing and loved being with people, but she was shy and preferred staying at home.

After the children were grown, he had met another woman with whom he felt an immediate bond.

They had everything in common and were perfectly matched.

They kept the relationship platonic ,

but after 5 years he went to my therapist friend

to talk with her about what he should do about these 2 women in his life.

My friend thought that he should divorce his wife and marry the woman he loved.

But in the end he decided to stay married and give up the love of his life.

My friend was baffled. She couldn't understand why he would make such a choice.

But he told her that he had made a promise to love and take care of his wife for the rest of her life.

Yes, it had been a mistake, but it didn't change the fact that he had made the promise.

“You mean you'd rather stay married to a woman you don't love

and never experience the joy of being with the woman you do love?” she asked. “Why???”

“It's not about my happiness, you see,” he said. “It's about my wife's.

I would rather suffer pain myself than hurt her.”

This man didn't make the selfish choice. He made the loving one, despite the cost to his own happiness.

The third guiding principle is to make the harder choice.

When my kids were in elementary school and junior high,

there was a family that had two kids the same age as mine.

One night their father, Tom, was feeling ill and he got up out of bed and was going to go downstairs.

When he got to the top of the stairs he all of a sudden felt dizzy

and before he knew what was happening he had tumbled over the stair rail and landed on the floor below,
his neck broken.

After weeks in the hospital and months at Gaylord, it became apparent that he would always be a quadriplegic.

Only his head responded to his brain's commands.

He couldn't move his hands, his arms, his legs, his feet.

He couldn't even breathe on his own.

At some point Tom asked his best friend to help him end his life.

His friend was willing, but then Tom changed his mind.

The easy choice was to give up, pack it in, end it all.

Logically, keeping him alive was a huge financial drain on the health insurance system.

Logically, keeping him alive was an emotional and physical drain on his family and friends.

Logically, facing life imprisoned in a lifeless body was an overwhelming emotional drain on Tom.

The easy choice, the logical choice, the rational choice would have been to put him out of his misery.

But Tom decided to play the hand he had been dealt.

He said, "If I give up, it might be easier on my children now, but I will be teaching them that it's ok to give up.

I'd rather teach them how to live the best life they can no matter what happens."

Tom lived for another 10 years.

He kept working with his adult son designing big toys for playgrounds all across this country,

and his positive attitude – his hope and faith and joy – was an inspiration to everyone he met.

Tom refused to give up or give in. Instead of making the easy choice, he made the harder one.

Jesus came to show us how to live.

He chose what was right – to preach and teach the truth even though it upset the religious authorities.

He chose what was loving – to heal people and raise people from the dead

even though it threatened the political authorities.

And he chose what was hard – to suffer and die on the cross because it was what God wanted.

Jesus chose what was right, what was loving, and what was hard.

And if "it is not I who live", as Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, "but Christ who lives in me",

then I will choose those same things – what is right, what is loving, and what is hard.

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so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life." [Romans 6:4]*

May God grant us the faith, the love, and the hope

to choose what is right and what is loving and what is hard,

no matter what the cost.

And as we live in this new way,

may the light of our choices shine in a way

that makes others want

what we've been given.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen