

A sermon preached at Eternal Love Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI, by Pastor Robert O. Balza on the 17th Sunday of Pentecost, September 19, 2010.

iLife: “It’s Not About Me”

Sermon # 5

i Live

By Faith in Christ Jesus

(“leggo your ego”)

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In the name of Christ crucified, dear friends:

Do you know the story of Narcissus? Narcissus is a character in Greek mythology. As a teenager, he was extremely beautiful, and all the females wanted him to love them, but he refused them all. Then, one day, when he was out hunting, he knelt down to drink from a quiet pool of water, and saw his reflection in the pool. He immediately fell in love with his own reflection, and wanted to marry it. Unaware that he was in love with himself, he was tortured that his reflection did not love him back, and in his despair, he beat himself to death.

Two things have been named after this mythological character. One is the narcissus flower, which was said to be the flower that grew over his grave, and the other is the term “narcissism.” That term is used to refer to the personality trait of egotism, conceit, and selfishness. It usually is applied to self-absorbed people who consider themselves to be more important than others, and who just live for themselves.

In their book *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, authors Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell give a few examples of the relentless rise of narcissism in our current culture:

- On a reality TV show, a girl planning her Sweet Sixteen wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet.
- Five times as many Americans undergo plastic surgery and cosmetic procedures as ten years ago
- Ordinary people hire fake paparazzi to follow them around to make them look famous
- High school students physically attack classmates and post YouTube videos of the beatings to get attention

Twenge and Campbell note that these examples are part of a trend, a destructive shift in American culture: the relentless rise of narcissism, an inflated view of self. Narcissists believe they are better than others, lack emotionally warm and caring relationships, constantly seek attention, and treasure material wealth and physical appearance. Observers of American culture say that people born in the 70's, 80's, and 90's can be called the "me generation" or the "iGeneration."

But that kind of thinking is not just affecting people born between 1970 and 1999. It is affecting me and probably affecting you. We are being influenced by "entitlement" thinking and "self" thinking.

- Worried about how to act in a social situation? "Just be yourself."
- What's good about your drunk driving conviction? "I learned a lot about myself."
- Concerned about your performance? "Believe in yourself." (Often followed by "and anything is possible.")
- Should you buy the new pair of shoes or get the nose ring? "Yes, express yourself."
- Why should you leave the unfulfilling relationship? "You have to respect yourself."
- Trying to get rid of a bad habit? "Be honest with yourself."
- Should you express your opinion? "Yes, stand up for yourself."

It's all quite a contrast to what the apostle Paul says in our little, but well-known, verse for today. Let's explore it.

"I" DIED WITH CHRIST

When the apostle Paul says, "*I have been crucified with Christ*" does he mean that he was one of the criminals that was crucified with Jesus on Good Friday? No, Paul was not afraid to admit that he was the chief of sinners, but he does not mean to say that he was literally crucified with Jesus on Good Friday.

So what does he mean? He himself explains:

- Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. -- Galatians 5:24
- For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. -- Romans 6:6

It was his "sinful nature", his "old self, the body of sin" that was crucified. Paul says that "nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." (Romans 7:18) This at least gives a partial explanation. But in the words of our text, Paul gives the full explanation.

"and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." In the original language of the New Testament, Paul uses a word that he rarely used, the Greek word for "I" which looks like this $\epsilon\gamma\omega$ (ego – with a short o). It is the same word that we often pronounce ego (with a long o). In other words, Paul says, "My ego was crucified with Christ, and no longer lives." His ego, his self-centered nature, his desire to run his own life and do things his way, was put to death when Christ arrived in his life.

His ego always was convinced that he was so righteous, so good, so pious. His ego assumed that God and the angels must be rejoicing because he was trying so hard to live by the commandments. His ego assumed that God would have to approve of his life.

But now, the ego was crucified with Christ. Since grace came to him, he was no longer the self-righteous Pharisee he once was. Now Christ lived in him. He was filled with grace, with

God's forgiveness and mercy. That's who he was. He was a child of mercy, a recipient of grace, an heir of salvation.

That was Paul's experience. What about you and me? Can we honestly say, "My ego was crucified with Christ" or do we constantly say, "Lord, leggo my ego!"

We don't want to be the old sin-serving and self-exalting person that we have been for so long. Grace has come. God's mercy and forgiveness calls us to a new life of faith in Christ and living for Christ. It's so hard to let go of the self. We love to think, "I'm good enough for God. I don't need a savior. I can take care of my own saving -- if I need any."

Crucify those thoughts. Put them to death. Live by faith in Jesus, and put all your hope in Him and in the holy life and innocent death that He lived and died for you.

"I" LIVE WITH CHRIST

Now the apostle continues: **"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

When I was growing up, the Beatles and other British rock bands were popular. One of those bands was "the Animals." In 1965 they recorded a song called "*It's My Life*" that reached #23 on the hit charts. The refrain went like this:

"It's my life and I'll do what I want
It's my mind and I'll think what I want
You can't tell me
It's my life and I'll do what I want"

I listened to that song many times, and I liked the message. That's right. It's my life, and I'll do what I want.

A few years later, in 1978, songwriter Billy Joel released a song that made it to #3 on the Billboard Hot 100. It was the song "*My Life*." The refrain went like this:

"I don't care what you say anymore, this is my life
Go ahead with your own life, leave me alone"

I liked that song, too. That's right. It's my life.

Those songs reflect the way we would like it to be. I love to think that I can just do it my own way, and in the end, I will be happy. But it just doesn't work that way.

God didn't make us to live for ourselves. And those who try to do it their way will miss the joy that comes from living the way God intended.

What convinced Paul to die to self and live for Jesus? It was the great sacrifice which Jesus made for Him. "He loved me and gave Himself up for me."

It was a freezing cold day on January 13, 1982, when Air Florida flight 90 took off from Washington National Airport. Because of icing on the wings, the plane failed to gain altitude, and it crashed into a bridge and plunged into the icy Potomac River. Only 6 of the plane's 79 occupants survived the crash. They all tried to hold onto the plane's tail section as witnesses called for help.

Hope arrived when a rescue helicopter appeared on the scene. The rescuers let down a rope with a safety harness to one of the survivors, Arland Williams. He, in turn passed the rope on to another survivor. This happened four more times. Each time Williams gave up the chance to be rescued so that someone else could be saved first. When the chopper came back for the final time to pick him up, he had disappeared. The cold finally had gotten to him, and he drowned. He gave himself up for the sake of others.

A nearby bridge was named the Arland Williams Bridge in his honor. Those whose lives were saved by Williams heroism say that they will never stop being thankful to him.

This is the power of love. This is why Christians deny themselves and live for their Savior. They will never stop being thankful to Him.

In a world that emphasizes self, that seeks to live for self, Christians are different. They live for Him who loved them and gave Himself up for them. They live by faith. Amen.