

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For whoever has died is freed from sin. **8** But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

–Romans 6:5-11

Dear Members of Peace and Trinity,

I read a book earlier this year titled *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, by Andrew Root, who is a professor at Luther Seminary in Minnesota. I've preached on this before, so for some this may be a repeat, but it bears repeating nonetheless. The book is rather philosophical in nature and truth be told, makes rather complex points that I either don't understand or are too much for a simple newsletter article, but the basic point comes down to the fact that the world is simply busier than it once was. The world demands that we are busy. Root gives the example that, long ago, humans would write letters with their ink and quills which would take something like an hour to write, and then a month or two of waiting would ensue as we waited for a response. The simple invention of email (with many steps in between of course) should save us something like 59 minutes and thirty seconds. What once took an hour, now takes a mere half a minute, leaving us with almost an hour of leisure time that we would otherwise not have had. I've actually seen this argument made recently about artificial intelligence. What once we needed humans to perform, we no longer need. This frees humans from the grueling task of flipping burgers, for example, to explore art, interests and leisure. Computers can simply do the work now!

However, we already know that this is not the case. Where once the expectation was one letter every month, our extra time simply gets filled with more emails. We are now expected to write upwards of fifty emails a day, and to wait for replies that will come in days, sometimes hours, and certainly not months. Where once we were called to work retail, and where AI has simply taken over, we are now called to fill our time with more work, more productivity. The world calls us to be productive, to be busy, to find something to do. If we aren't, it has almost instilled a sense of guilt into us.

It is Root's contention that this busy-ness has led humans to believe that they can achieve good for themselves. If we simply work hard enough, do the right stuff, never sleep, write the emails, make the contacts, create and lead the classes, etc. then we

can achieve “the good life” that we have always wanted. Then, once the good life is achieved, we can rest. The problem, of course, is that the good life is never achieved, there is always more to be done. We always want more and we can, by virtue of living in a busy world, never be content.

By extension the problem is that the church has, by-and-large, given into this narrative. The church needs to be busy so that busy people are willing to take time out of their busy schedules to receive a good life from the church that will help them deal with their already busy lives. The church, however, was not built for that. Not only was it not built to compete with a world that continuously speeds up, but we also proclaim, quite loudly, that we do not think the good life is achieved on one’s own. We cannot do it alone. Not only that, but the good life exists not only here and now, as the world would have us believe, but it actually exists in the next life as well, not because of anything we have done, but because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This world is not all that there is. There is more to be had. The eternal life and promise of Christ are real and relevant to the world in which we live.

Paul writes, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” This is a message worthy of proclamation. It is also a message that the world has no interest in hearing. It runs counter to every narrative the world spins, and it is no less important because of it. So let us not lose hope. Let us continue to proclaim the message in new ways to reach new ears. And, at the same time, let us not simply be a church that gives into the notion that we must be busy all the time. Let us be intentional about what we do. Let us be faithful in how we do it. Let us listen to the call of Christ in the midst of a chaotic world that, now more than ever, needs a message of hope, resurrection, and transcendence.

Peace,
Pastor Ian