

Year B - Proper 6 - Trinity 2, 13 June 2021

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. 2 Corinthians 5.14-15

On Friday the 2020 European Football Championship finals kicked off in 2021 with the opening game between Turkey and Italy. The game ending with a (result). It is worth reminding ourselves should our geography be a little shaky that a region of modern day Turkey encompasses a small area of mainland Europe and ancient Constantinople modern day Istanbul, on the European side of the Bosphorus. If you know little about modern day football (soccer) I invite you to follow the football player N'Golo Kanté (30) during this year's championship tournament. Kanté plays in the Premier League for Chelsea. Being French by birth he will be playing for France, who are one of the favourites to win the tournament. His position is as a central defensive midfielder (CDM). His parents are from Mali.

This morning on this second Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity, who gives life and is our life I want to focus on two verses from St Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. Scholars date the letter to the early 50s of the Common Era. You may want to find the passage in today's service sheet before I read it again. I have highlighted the passage for your ease.

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Now let's try and follow the logic of these two sentences. Paul asserts that Christ has died for all implying that this death was out of love and that it is Christ's love, his example of love that urges us on. And because Jesus has died for all, all have died. This is obviously not meant literally, but metaphorically. Paul continues by making a distinction, which will startle us, if we accept the full impact of what he is saying. I doubt most will. Again all have died, because Christ died for all, that all might live for him and no longer for themselves. So far. So good.

Let's hear Paul once more. Christ died "that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." Paul is implying that true life is only to be had by living for Christ. All else is a shadow existence. It is Christ alone who died for all and it is Christ alone who is raised for all that all might have life.

Obviously we see life in abundance all around us. The European Football Championship can serve as an example. This year's tournament is being hosted by eleven countries in eleven different cities across Europe. This display of interconnectedness qualifies as a sign of life as places, countries and peoples are joined together. The championship will be followed by millions of people. It will afford those who follow the fortunes of the 24 competing countries an opportunity to follow a good number of the best football players in the world currently playing football. It will most likely be a logistic success. Don't ask about the carbon footprint! It has commercial and economic implications and outcomes. Hopefully there will be one or two exciting games and if we are lucky there might even be a few *good* football games. Like many things in life there is a great deal of mediocrity in football. "The trivial round, the common task..."

Another example of life we are witnessing today is the need for young people to meet, to be together, to dance and to sing, to converse and to enjoy each other's company. We see this need in Vienna as young adults gather along the Donaukanal, in the Stadtpark and until recently in the Resselpark, at the Karlsplatz and in front of the Karlskirche. People the world over in so many ways are full of life.

How can we understand Paul's words that we are giving attention to? How might they become meaningful to us? I suggest doing so by looking at Paul's life. Paul before his conversion was a man of some passion. He was full of life. The Acts of the Apostles testifies to this. Shortly before his conversion the author of the Acts of the Apostles writing about Paul informs the reader,

"... Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found

any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9.1.2)

The former is one angle from which Paul can be seen, but perhaps more illuminating is for Paul to speak himself? He gives us the shortest of autobiographies when he addresses the Jews in Jerusalem from the steps of the Temple in Hebrew saying,

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.” (Acts 22.3)

And in the letter to the Philippians he writes,

“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” (Philippians 3:4–6)

Paul is a person who is full of life before and after his conversion, but it is the seeing Paul, once blind, who says that only those who live to Christ are truly alive to God. It is they who no longer regard anyone one from a human point of view.

One way of approaching Paul’s view is to see how Paul sees himself before and after his conversion as we are doing. After his conversion the life that he led under the Law no longer has a hold on him as he lives his life for Christ. Realising that he will never ever be able to keep the Law in such a way that it will make him alive to God in the fullest sense. It is Christ who accomplishes this. His death and his being raised are what make Paul alive to God in a way the Law could never accomplish. Now he can rely on God’s grace and on God’s grace alone. He no longer needs to save himself or keep himself by a living under the dictate of the Law, but is saved by what God has accomplished for him and for all in Christ Jesus. Now he can live trusting in God’s might alone, his grace.

And because he can live a full life he lives this new found life towards God. He binds himself to God from whom he cannot be severed. Paul writes to the church in Rome words that it is my privilege to read at funerals, words of comfort intended for the mourners.

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8.38,39)

Paul will risk everything. He will risk his life. He will if the tradition is correct die a martyr's death in Rome, a death that witnesses to Christ's dying and living that brings for all. Paul no longer lives to the world, he no longer lives to the Law, which only made him aware of death, living a shadow existence in the midst of life, but to the source of light and life to God. Seeing that God has died for all, all remain in death according to Paul's understanding until they experience God's grace. Paul's language is stark. Either you are dead, tot, finito spiritually or alive spiritually.

At morning prayer on Sundays the responsory, using Pauline words from the third chapter of the letter to the church in Colossae close to Pamukkale, Heliopolis and Laodicea in western Anatolia, reads

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead

**And Christ shall give you light.**

You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.

**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead.**

Set your minds on things that are above,  
not on things that are on the earth.

Those words of St Paul about sleep point us in the same direction as his words about death. The metaphor of sleep is more palatable than Paul's words about death, which get into our face, but then Paul does get into your face... Imagine for a moment attending an interactive Christian retreat. Thinking of Paul's words about people being asleep, or walking in their sleep, I can imagine the retreat leader getting everyone to physically shake one another as a reminder to be alive for Christ. For when Christ our life takes up his home in our lives there is not one aspect of our lives, one iota of our lives that does not want to live for Christ, who is our life, even if at first this may make us shudder. Of course we withhold. Of course we too often live for our own comfort alone. We simply don't get it right. Too often we judge others and then too quickly. What's your *too often*? And where

do you withhold? And can we live more for Christ in whom is our life? And how much is enough? Finding a right balance - an ongoing task...

We don't like to think of people as dead, especially when they exhibit so much vitality in so many aspects of their lives, even though they often do live for themselves alone, or for this generation alone, or for the family alone, or for power alone, or for status alone, or for wealth, or for this life alone. The Christian is called as Paul makes it clear to live for him who died and was raised, who died and was raised **for all** and in doing so live for all. Everyone matters. The CEO, the refugee, the homeless, the schizophrenic or as made abundantly clear in *The Forty Rules of Love* by Alif Shafak peoples of other faiths, peoples of differing ethnicities, the beggar, the harlot, the alcoholic and yes, even the zealot. Christ died and was raised for all. He has you in his sights. He has each one of his sights. Look out.

As long as we live for ourselves in Paul's stark language we are dead. He, Paul can testify to this because of his experience on the road to Damascus: dying to the old life and being raised with Christ to live anew. It is when we live for Christ who gives life, who makes us a new creation that we are alive in the Pauline sense of the word. How does Paul sum up succinctly today what I have had to labour over – hopefully for our benefit? “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Which leads him to write a few sentences later, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.” We see that Christ died for all in order that all might be raised to new life.

By the way I will enjoy the European Football Championship. I will hopefully feel alive for most of the games I will follow. Some games can put you to sleep... I was looking forward to watching Kevin de Bruyne (29), probably out of the tournament because of the brutal injury he suffered during the European Championship League final against Chelsea. But I look forward to seeing Phil Foden (21) play for England, Kai Havertz (21) for Germany, and Marcel Sabitzer (27) for Austria and I will be looking out for N'Golo Kanté to name a few, while looking out for new talent.

Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. **Amen.** (Ephesians 3.20,21)