

Resistance

Romans 5:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever had a situation in the office or in school out of which you could see no escape? Your thoughts just go round and round and round and round and you get caught up in your little claustrophobic mind. You can't see any way out. It's almost as if you're bound with iron bands. You think round in your circle and right round again and right round again. Whether it's physical weakness through a cold or an emotional tightness through an emotional situation at school or whether it's just a kind of mental block that you have in an office job, it seems that we're just tied up in our own little circle of thinking.

Really, you just wonder how to escape. The psychologists or the philosophers don't really help us today, neither the dramatists. The Christian theater class meets on Thursday and we're trying to find a production that we can do. It doesn't matter which of them you look through -- Camus, Miller, Painter, Williams-- it doesn't matter who it is, all the dramatists do the same thing. They describe the hopelessness and the futile little circle that most people live in today.

If you go to the philosophers or the psychologists, they're in the same trip. They're all following, more or less, Skinner's implication that we're little run down machines that are driven by deterministic and fatalistic kind of powers. We can't escape from our carnal existence. Brothers and sisters, that's one of the exciting things about this book [the Bible], it's one of the really exhilarating things about it that we believe and discuss here on Sundays. Because Jesus is the best empirical evidence of who the Creator is that we've got.

But the book itself is exciting and exhilarating because it does really seem to give you authentic expressions of a great magnanimous mind that is bigger than our own. It's good when we get caught up in our own little claustrophobic circles of thinking, to come into this theater on Sunday and get a glimpse of a bigger view of it all. It's good to be blasted out of our little circles, our little vicious circles that we go round and round in. Some of us just go round and round in those circles for life. Instead of becoming greater and bigger and bigger so that at the last day the spiritual body transfigures the physical body and we just blast up into God's space -- instead of that many of us have become wizened and withered and weakened -- smaller and smaller as our life goes on.

Really, it's God's will that we should begin to see things the way he sees them. That's why this book is kind of exciting. What we need here on Sunday mornings is what I think Scott prayed for -- a spirit of revelation that would break through the little vicious circles that we get into. We need revelation that would split the atoms of our own thoughts and would get us out into a place where there is a tremendous energy release and you begin to think and feel the way the Creator does. That's really what we're trying to do here on Sunday mornings.

You remember that last Sunday, we began to see that God made us and put us here really because he wanted our company. He put us here so that we would become like him and would be his friends forever. That's the real reason. It's so good to get out of that circle where they're treasuring you because of the A grade or the B grade or the C grade or they're treasuring you because you can move these books from this spot to that spot or because you can type so many words a minute. It's so good to get outside that little circle and see, "Look it's not even because my husband likes me or my

father loves me or because my roommate can tolerate me. I am here for a bigger reason than all those things. The Creator of the world has made me because he wants me to become like him and he wants me to be his friend forever." It's really good to say that.

You remember we saw that that was why God made us with certain capacities such as he had himself. He made us with a spirit like his. He made us with a mind like his, emotions like his, a will like his and a physical body, just as he has a spiritual body. We will have a spiritual body when this body dies, and it's good to see that God governed everything to enable this plan to come about -- that we would live with him forever as his dear friends.

You remember the one vital thing that would make us exactly like himself, he left to our personal choice. The life, the very life that runs through the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the very life that makes the trinity family unique, that makes it eternal, that makes it able to fly through millions of miles of space in a second, the life that enables it to have continual forgiveness and continual gentleness and peace running through it, that life we had to choose for ourselves.

You remember it was talked about in Genesis as a tree of life. God's plan was that we'd have all the capacities to be like him but we ourselves would have to opt into his trinity family by our own free choice. It was up to us to be borne of his Spirit or of his life by our own will and our own choice. You remember we saw that the first man didn't do that at all. He decided he'd live by his own wits about what was good and what was evil. He'd decide what was right and wrong for himself. He'd do without this unique, uncreated life that God offered him.

When he decided to do that, God withdrew that life from him. He withdrew the offer of that uncreated Holy Spirit from him. Immediately the whole natural environment and man's own personality deteriorated and declined into death. You remember we outlined what that death entailed. I couldn't think of a high enough powered engine but I thought of a 289 engine and likened it to running a high-powered engine on regular gas. That's what it was like when the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the world because man decided to go it alone.

It was like that. Immediately our minds began to be impaired, our emotions began to be unbalanced, and the body became weaker. As we lived like that, we began to spread that living for self throughout the world. It became a pro-self world, (living for itself all the time) and an anti-God world (working against God). Eventually the Holy Spirit was withdrawn even from the spiritual world, and the world filled with evil spirits. That's what we mean when we say, "death began to work in us personally and in our environment". That was the kind of situation that resulted at that time.

Now, let's pray that God's Spirit would somehow be able to give you and me insights into that situation now. Let's trust him that he'll be able to do that and bring us into some new insights. I think a lot of us are experiencing that death and we don't know why we're experiencing it. The mind is impaired, the emotions are unbalanced, and the body is weak, sick and deteriorating. We find ourselves fighting an uphill battle against wrong dreams and against wrong thoughts day after day after day and we don't know why it is. We seem to be living in death in the midst of life.

I think there are real reasons for it. I think sometimes, it's because we haven't the same view of sin or of independence of God as God himself has. Would you look at that next verse that we'll study this morning? It's Romans 5:13. Maybe we could just take part "a" of the verse, the first half of it.

Romans 5:13, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given." That's pretty obvious, isn't it? You remember, in Genesis 3:6, you read how Adam declared his independence of God by going his own way.

Genesis 3:6: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate." Now that was the sin. Sin entered the world at that moment by Adam declaring, "I'd go it alone without your Holy Spirit."

Then look over to Exodus 20:1. That's the moment that the law was given. It's the first time that law came into the world. Exodus 20:1: And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image."

All right, so that's obvious. Sin was in the world before the law was given, you can see that.

There are that many pages between the time sin came into the world and the time the law was given. If you allow for a gap between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3, during which the earth was without form and void, that gap may be thousands of years. And if you allow for the obvious gaps that the Bible details clearly exist in the genealogies, you can see that certainly thousands (maybe millions), but certainly thousands of years existed between the time that the first sin was committed and the time the law entered the world.

Certainly the creation research people would say at least four or five thousand years, wouldn't they? Some of us would say maybe even more than that. But certainly thousands of years existed between the time that sin entered the world and law came into the world. Now brothers and sisters do you see what that means?

Sin is not primarily something connected with the breaking of a known law. Sin itself is a resistance or a rejection of God's spiritual life. I think a lot of us get little legalistic, moralistic minds. (I'm being hard on the Baptists here) but we say, "Oh yes, sin is going to the theater. That's a sin, don't do that. Smoking, that's a sin. Okay, don't do that. In Methodism we had dancing too. We had six of them. I am not supporting those but I am saying that our main aim seemed to be to make life as miserable as we possibly could.

It's good the Baptists are catching up with the "no smoking" now and that God has given it to us for so long. But some of us tend to think of sin as just breaking one of the six cardinal commandments that we have in evangelical Christianity.

Or some of us think, "Sin is just breaking any one of the Ten Commandments." We get very moralistic and legalistic. As long as we're not breaking any of those things, or we're not doing any of the "no-no's", then we're okay. We're not sinning. But brothers and sisters do you see sin was in the world before there was any law? Sin is something that is broader than just the breaking of laws that you and I line up and list. You can see that sin for Adam was rejecting God's offer of spiritual life.

I think in our own lives we need to see that sin can be that too for us. I think there are times when we are actually sinning and we don't realize it. Death works as a result of that in our lives but we don't realize that we've sinned. We say, "Well, we haven't broken one of the Ten Commandments today, we haven't broken any of the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount today, no we haven't

sinned." Brothers and sisters do you see that Adam sinned by resisting God's Holy Spirit?

God said, "Look, receive my life into you today." Adam said, "No, I don't want it." Now that's sin. Sin is just rejecting God's offer of life through his Holy Spirit. Do you see since Jesus died, God has been able to replace the Holy Spirit among us in this world? The Holy Spirit is all around us and about us. He's offering himself to us again and again every morning and every evening. If we're resisting that offer, that little movement within us of God's Spirit, then that is sin. That is sin for us and it will bring about death.

Now, if you wanted to look at details, let's take two or three examples. Some of us get into a disagreement with our roommate or with a friend. We really do feel that they have not treated us fairly. We find that they criticized us to somebody else or they talked about us behind our back. Resentment comes up in our hearts and we feel the resentment against them. Every time we meet them, there's that resentment at the back of our eyes. They're trying to be open with us and we're trying to run a little sensitivity tea group with them, but at the back of our eyes is defeat, suspicion and resentment. And God's Spirit comes into us, (maybe doesn't use these words) but he brings home this truth to us. Maybe you'd look at Romans 12:19. You see the Holy Spirit is always involved day-by-day and moment-by-moment in trying to bring to us God's own attitude. And in a situation like this, he'll bring home to us this truth.

Romans 12:19: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" And the Holy Spirit will come into us and give a little impression deep down inside of us, a little tiny impression to stop the resentment, just let it be. Just forgive the person as you would want God to forgive you.

Brothers and sisters, if we would bow to that movement of God's Spirit within us about the resentment, you'd find that Jesus would flood us with a Holy Spirit of love for that person. But so often instead, we do what Adam did. We resist that movement of the Holy Spirit within us. Nobody can hit us with a law. Nobody can say, "That's the fifth commandment you broke." Nobody can hit us with a law, yet we know we've resisted God's generous Spirit. And to that extent, we grow smaller and death begins to work in our relationship with that person, doesn't it?

You know how many of us have death. Life is an interaction with the environment; death is the lack of that interaction with your environment. How many of us have ceased to have any interaction with certain friends because we've allowed death to seep in through resentment, through resenting and rejecting the working of God's generous Spirit in us.

So you see that's what I mean, that some of us find death coming in different relationships and we wonder why? Why is there death here? Why is death working in me? Why can I not be open and loving to this person? So often it's because we've resisted the offer of the Holy Spirit that has come to us.

Dear ones, do you see this morning, the Holy Spirit is working on each one of you and me to make us more like Jesus. God's Holy Spirit is flooding throughout the whole world. You remember Gerard Manley Hopkins said, "The earth is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil crushed.... and all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; and wears man's smudge and shares man's smell." And that's it.

The whole world is filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit of Jesus is approaching each one of us trying to get us to respond to him. Again and again you have the same choices Adam had in the

Garden of Eden. You can respond and go a generous way that is in line with the picture of Jesus in the New Testament -- or you can resist it and go your own miserable mean little way.

So, many of us you see have death working in us because we've resisted this life that God is offering to us. It comes in different situations. I can think of another one. You have a situation in the office. It's just chaos and the whole thing has got utterly complex. She took your typewriter or didn't send it for repair. Your boss is having trouble at home and he is really leaning on you, just leaning you into the ground. They're on your back all the time. Or in the school situation you've had a cross-up with the professor. It seems you can't get the line straight again and everything's complicated.

Do you see at that moment that the Holy Spirit comes down to you again in a hideous, impossible, difficult, domestic or professional situation and he brings home a truth? You can see it in Ephesians 2:6. "And God raised us up with him, (with God) and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Then Ephesians 1:21 tells where that position is: "Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

You know how the mind is tossing at night and worrying about the situation in the office or the school the next day. And the Holy Spirit comes down to us and says, "Look, you're in Jesus, above all these things, at the Father's right hand. Now just thank God that he is going to sort this thing out. Your job is just to take your position in Jesus and love. You are to be like Jesus and let him take care of the thing." But Satan gets in and says, "Nothing is solved by that kind of unearthly behavior. You get down there and you fight it out, you slog it out and you worry it out."

Loved ones, do you see there are two ways to go. You can either receive the life of the Holy Spirit and say, "All right, it doesn't make much sense to me to sort it out that way, but I'll receive you and accept you." If you do that, you release through Jesus, a flood of the Holy Spirit to go out and repair the situation in the office or in the school. But again there are two ways to go. If you resist the Holy Spirit, then death begins to work. In your mind at night, you lose the night's sleep so that the next day you're less able to deal with the situation. But it's a resistance of the Holy Spirit that brings death.

In other words, sin is resisting God's will for you at that moment. The Father hasn't put us all here to weave in and out each other's life whatever way we want to go. The Father hasn't set us all here and said, "Okay, you three and half billion, go", and they just go. The Father has it organized. He has plans for each of us. He has a beautiful harmony. In classical literature they used to talk about the "music of the spheres". Even in their pagan minds they have the image way back that God had put inside them that there should be a harmony in the universe.

Brothers and sisters, God has plans for each one of our lives. He knows what he wants you to do tomorrow. He knows what he wants you to do on Tuesday evening. He has plans for us. He has a certain will for each of us at each moment. It was the same with Adam. There would come a time when it was God's will for him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Otherwise, why put it there? But he wanted him to eat of that tree after he had received of the tree of life. Then he'd be able to know good by experiencing good and evil just by seeing and understanding what it was.

So, it was God's will at that moment for Adam to receive of the tree of life, the Holy Spirit. Sin is resisting God's will for you at that moment and that's really what you and I often do. When we do

that, death immediately sets into our lives. Here's an easy example that many of us face. You come home at night, the highway was packed, and it was nose to tail traffic. All the way people were screeching to a stop. The road was slippery. You get home and you're worn out and the Holy Spirit comes through to you. You can see it in Psalm 46:10. He may not put it in the words of the Bible but it's there in Psalm 46:10. The only reason I am quoting God's word, brothers and sisters, is that that's the way you care whether it is the Holy Spirit speaking to you or not. You just check what the Holy Spirit wrote in the Bible. Is this consistent with what he wrote? That's the way to keep yourself clear from deceptive spirits.

So at that moment you come home, you're worn out and the Holy Spirit comes through, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). The Holy Spirit just says to you, "Sit down, be quiet, and just rest. Just know that I am God. Just receive my life into you." But your mind works, "Yes, but I have assignments to do tonight. I have to get some food, I have to do this and I have to wash and iron some clothes." So we don't sit. We resist the Holy Spirit who is saying, "Be still and know that I am God."

One gurgle from our stomach and we decide, "No, no, no. That's not spiritual food we need, we need real food." We get up and go to the kitchen. The sparks are flying as we're getting the TV dinners into the oven. Then we decide we'll turn the TV on as we're waiting. The TV goes on and you hear all the mess that is in the world. Before you know it, death settles in on you. Your spirit becomes utterly dissipated and you find that the evening is lost and wasted because there's no sitting still and knowing that he is God. Everything is taking control of you from that moment on.

Now brothers and sisters, do you see that is rejecting God's will for you at that moment? The Holy Spirit is good to us. The Holy Spirit will keep us in psychological and spiritual and physical balance if we will listen to him. But sin is resisting the Holy Spirit's will for you at that moment.

Those of you who are away from home remember home situations where you got into ridiculous tangles because you spoke just what you thought. You resisted the Holy Spirit saying, "Shut up." But you just wanted to lay the whole thing out and clear it.

Loved ones, do you see that's what we're doing. Many of us are experiencing death in ourselves because we're really sinning. Sin always brings death but it isn't a sin that can be lined up under one of the Ten Commandments. It is sin that is resistance to God's Spirit, and that's the heart of sin. It's independence of God. It's the resistance to his Spirit's will for you at that moment.

We get it in the mornings you know. We get it again and again in the mornings. We waken up and the Holy Spirit comes right through, whatsoever things are lovely and true and of good report, think on these things. The Holy Spirit comes through and says, "This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." But we don't go with him. We resist him and we sink back into our own indolence and our own lethargy and we sink back into our own emotional and physical depression. And before 15 minutes have passed, we're in the depths of degradation. We're either in depression or in physical degradation or we're in an intellectual depression of some kind.

Brothers and sisters, do you see the Holy Spirit will always come to you at the right moment? If you'll accept him and receive his life, he will take you up the way he's going. The Holy Spirit is only going one way, always only one way. He is going up to the Father.

The Father is there and Jesus is there. The Holy Spirit comes through Jesus and goes back up to the Father. That's what's happening all the time whenever we look at him. But instead of that we often let the Holy Spirit ride up to those sunlit uplands of the spiritual life while we stay down here without him and with death working in us.

Now brothers and sisters do you see a wee bit what death is, and what sin is? Sin is resisting God's Spirit as he comes down to you at a certain moment. Now you don't get all shook up. You don't need to walk tentatively saying, "Am I hearing the Holy Spirit or am I not? Am I hearing that?" No. Just walk believing that the Father is your loving Father that loves you with all his heart, that you can trust him and that he'll tell you what to do when you need to do. Then respond to him immediately. Don't wait for the thing to work itself out into some sinful act, thought or word.

Sin is not basically an act or thought or word. Sin is resisting God's Spirit when his Spirit first comes to you. As a result of that you eventually move into acts; sinful thoughts and words. But dear ones, I think really, a lot of us would escape death if we would treat the Spirit as our guide. By all means, look at the laws as a guide to what the Holy Spirit has written in the past but look to the Holy Spirit as he witnesses God's will to us and respond to that.

Would you pray that God would give you an insight into it? Maybe some of the things that I shared are some of the things that you have trouble with. But do you see that isn't important? What's important is that the Holy Spirit could show you why you're experiencing death in your life. It's that he could show you why you are experiencing an emotional death or a mental death or a spiritual death by pointing out as clearly as he pointed out to Ananias and Sapphira. "Look, this is the point. Will you stop resisting me here?"

Shall we pray? Dear Father, we thank you for your goodness and for your kindness. Thank you Father that you're the God of order and the God of harmony. We thank you that you have a definite plan for our own lives. Father, we trust you, now to find in us a ready heart and a sensitive spirit that is anxious to go your way.

So Holy Spirit, will you point out things to us in these coming days of this week? We tell you we want to respond on the first second. We want to respond to you immediately and receive you. We want to walk clear of sin and clear of death. We trust you Father for revelation during this week so that you'll be glorified in us and death will be driven out, for your glory. Amen.