

Have you ever sat on a train or on the tube and read a newspaper over the shoulder of the person next to you – no of course you haven't you're all far too nice for that! But having lived for a while in the centre of London and travelling a bit by tube I have managed to read bits from newspapers and books and even once to my shame I was tempted to read someone else's letter. Now imagine you were there on the tube squashed up against loads of other people and someone was reading a letter and over their shoulder your eye landed on the phrase "you were dead."

How would you react? You might take a good long hard look at that person wouldn't you because after all they'd be a walking miracle.

This morning as we think about the passage we had read earlier in the service it is a little like looking over the shoulder of a Christian in the Asian city of Ephesus, there on what is now the west coast of Turkey, some 1900 years ago. As we do so we see exactly those words, "As for you, you were dead."

Now I've watched enough detective programmes and episodes of Silent Witness to know that I need to establish the cause of death. Paul as he wrote made that very clear, you were dead in your transgressions and sins – what?

What God said through Paul to those Christians in Ephesus was that at one point they had been dead because of their sins. What did he mean?

In 2007 a rumour went round that press that Paris Hilton was going to be disinherited by her grandfather. Comments in the press said that Barron Hilton, grandfather to Paris, and Hilton Hotels largest stockholder, was going to cut her out of her \$60 million inheritance. It was said that that he became infuriated with all the press surrounding his granddaughter since her drunk driving arrest and subsequent time in jail. Her wrong actions caused a breakdown in their relationship.

That gives us a glimpse towards what's being said here. These people had not always lived how God wanted them. They had decided in many situations to go after what they wanted rather than what God wanted. That's not unusual, we all do it. The result was twofold. Firstly in a sense God had disinherited them no longer his children because their lives showed they didn't want him.

That's not petulance, a kind of if you're not my friend I'm not yours, but an inevitable consequence that if we live without God in our lives then our ultimate destiny is to be cut off from God.

But secondly they were dead to God in that they were insensitive to him. You poke a dead body and it doesn't react so with these people in the past the very mention of God would have caused no reaction. It doesn't to many people today – perhaps it doesn't to you.

They were dead to God, cut off from him and if you'd told them it wouldn't have mattered – that's what being dead to God is it doesn't matter, or at least it doesn't matter as far as we see it. However we can't always see where we are heading. I was driving back up a motorway a few weeks ago and there was a traffic jam on the other side. I clocked about a mile and half of stationary traffic. As I drove on people were sailing along the motorway totally unaware of what lay ahead.

These people had been living without reference to God and as such would ultimately have found themselves cut off from God and that for ever. That was not what God wanted, then or now. "But because of his great love for us..." v4. Because he loved these people and because he loves us God was not prepared simply to let these people rush to the inevitable end their sin would result in. So God acted.

As I drove up the motorway there was nothing I could do either to stop the people or help them because they couldn't change direction. But for these people in Ephesus something had happened that had caused them to change direction.

Many years back we had a dog, a golden retriever called cracker. One day I'd been playing football with some friends and after the game I let cracker of the lead and one of the guys was throwing a ball for her. The ball landed in the middle of a large contraption for scarifying the pitch with all kinds of bits of metal sticking out. The dog was oblivious to this and had eyes only for the ball and a fair pace building up when I shouted at her and she stopped and ran to me instead.

Well God did more than shout, though often the path from death to life will begin with God's word prompting us.

What God did is there in v5, "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved".

What did God do? He made us alive. He dealt with what separated us from him. He sent his own son Jesus to die in your place and mine taking the punishment we deserve for our sin.

So often we cannot even undo the effects of the things we do wrong to others. In our prisons are many who have murdered either by deliberate act or careless driving and they cannot put the situation right. They cannot undo what has been done. We cannot somehow make up to God our rejection of his love our rebellion against his will. We deserve punishment.

But what we could not do he did when Christ died for us on the cross. Jesus took the punishment we deserve. He paid the penalty for our sin. His death saves us from death, and restores us as God's children.

Why did God do this because of his great love and mercy v4.

God's love is so great that despite all our rejection of him, the way we live without any reference to him he still loves us and still wants us to be his children.

This is what we mean by that word grace – God's love to us even when we don't deserve it.

It is through God's grace we are saved from the result of our sin and made alive to God when we were dead.

That is what had happened to these Christians in Ephesus. Yes that had been dead but God had acted and his grace shown in Jesus had brought about a response and now they were no longer cut off from God or insensitive to him. Instead of dead they were alive and all through the grace of God. Grace, the undeserved love of God, which has the power to move people from death to life.

Such is the story of Stephen Lungu, who intended to petrol bomb a mission meeting in Zimbabwe. Standing in the tent he heard a young woman give her testimony. When the preacher announced from Romans 3:23 "the wages of sin is death" and that many were going to die he thought the preacher knew about the raid. The message of new life in Jesus touched the terrorist, who, clutching his bag of grenades and petrol bombs made his way to the front and found that new life in Christ.

It is possible for the lost to be found the dead to come to life because of the love of God which we don't deserve which is summed up in the word grace.

This is also what Chloe Lorna and Sandy in different ways have found. Yes they are today trying to live the life God wants them to and they are trying to follow Jesus in every way but the beginning was through the grace of God – his love for them drew them to him in Jesus.

Some days ago while I was thinking about his morning I googled "change for life" and came across a website which said this, "there are 2 lives for all of us ... the life we live and the "unlived" life within us."

Now the website went on to say it can help me if I'm overweight, tired, sleep too much, depressed and so on and the general jist seemed to be that with their help I can find the answers within me.

What Chloe, Lorna and Sandy are saying this morning is that actually there is another life but it is God's life which God brings to us by his grace and by the power of his life in us.

There are two ways we can live one with God and one without. These young people have chosen to live with God as have many of us here who would with them testify to positive nature of that life with God.

So what about you?

If God were writing his letter to you today would he say "you were dead in your transgressions and sins," or would he say, "you are dead in your transgressions and sins"?

If you have not understood and experienced that grace of God which saves us from the result of our sin and restores us as God's children then let me encourage you today to ask God through Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

Let me ask you to change from living with yourself as God and ruler in your life to allowing God to be God and ruler.

Let me encourage you to change course.

Here is the transcript of an actual radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October, 1995. The radio conversation released by the Chief of Naval Operations on November 10, 1995.

Americans: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

Americans: this is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States' Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers, and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north, that's one five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

Friends we may feel we are indestructible and that we can sail through life without reference to God and be alright. God says to us today I am God – your call!