

I walked through the non-descript door on the side of the church.....I was greeted with the unmistakable aroma of cigarette smoke as I passed through and made my way up the dimly lit stairs, into a fluorescent lit, unremarkable and musty fellowship hall room of sorts....and by this time the scent of tobacco that wafted up the stairs with me was blended with the invigorating smell of freshly brewed bold coffee....And draped with the double fragrance of marlboros and folgers....styrofoam cup.....in hand....we sat in those creaky brown metal folding chairs....the uncannily uncomfortable kind....

There was an air of familial-like bond and expectation.....among people in that room....like even if they had never met each other.....they *knew* each other at a deep level...strangers eyes lock and they *knew*....as we sat down and began to wrap up our small talk....we directed our attention to the person who walked up to the front of the room... and began to speak...began to testify.....This person's witness was unique in detail....but the heart of the story he was telling....was familiar...to most in the room....it was the story most of the people in that room.....could claim as their story too...

It was not my story....but I was there with my dad....and it was his story....and so even though I knew it only second-hand.....I was familiar.....and had been impacted by that story....

The person at the front of the room was articulating the excruciating experience of the horrors of addiction....how alcoholism....had wreaked havoc on their whole life....life now defined by that addiction....who they were....their relationships, their job, their family, their finances....and how eventually they hit rock bottom....I had heard my dad tell a similar story...eventually you realize....you can't go on any further like this.....you find yourself in your car in the middle of the night in a parking lot...and you have no idea how you got there...or how long you have been there.....and something has to give....

Eventually...the people in that room....that smelled like the mixture of marlboros and folgers...in those creaky, brown, metal folding chairs....had realized at some point....in some way or another.....and had testified to me.... In so many words....and I had witnessed through my dad...

....that in order to save their life they had to lose it.....for them to live, they had to die....

People who have been a part of *Alcoholics Anonymous*....know this in every fiber of their being....

....that in order to save their life they had to lose it.....for them to live, they had to die....

It can be a bit jarring for some of us, who have never lived with an addiction or lived with an addict to wrap our heads around what Jesus is telling his disciples.... It's a peculiar paradox...or just absurd on the surface....it can be easy to just brush it aside... as one of Jesus's pithy sayings....

After all....we don't want to lose our life.....we spend too much time...constructing it....building it....protecting it.....and everything in the world seems to be shouting at us to hold on tighter....and don't let go....the prospect of losing it...can seem terrifying... like the last thing we'd want to do...

Even for people wrapped up in addiction....aware at some level how it is ruining their lives.....it's a terrifying prospect....to let go....

And, you and me.....we've maybe never even had a rock bottom moment....like a glaring spotlight shining on our body.....that forces us to confront this....to live any longer we have to die....to save our life....we have to lose it.... So what about us....without the gift of those rooms.....with the odor of marlboro mixed with folgers....?

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For the first time in Mark, Jesus....a few verses earlier foreshadows....his own death....and his resurrection.....And Paul says that this God we worship....is the one who gives *life to the dead*....and who *calls into existence things that do not exist*....

**Death and resurrection....life to the dead.....**

**There Is an odor of promise mixed with power, here....can you catch its scent...**

**We can do this....this is what we have been called into....this is what we are made for....invited to....those of us....who carry his cross....on our brow....everywhere we go....those of us who have died in baptism.....those of us who travel this lenten path.....this is what we do....in order to save our life...we have to lose it...to live we have to die....**

**God promises us that after death comes resurrection.....after we die, we live....after we lose our life.....we save it.....and we live with that power....that raised Jesus from the dead flowing through us....**

**All those people in those creaky metal chairs were living witnesses of this.....my dad is a living witness of this....**

**To save your life you have to lose it.... To live you have to die...**

**It's still not easy...but neither is it for those who are in AA....but with eyes clearly fixed on the reality of what they have been through...it becomes the only logical thing to do....**

**Remember that promise and power I mentioned though....empowered by that resurrection spirit....with our eyes clearly fixed on the God revealed in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.....we can hear this call to die....to lose our life....as an invitation....the only logical invitation to respond too...for baptized children of God....knowing by faith that life and resurrection always is waiting on the other side....**

**And, slowly...as we gather in community....around God's very means of grace.....hearing again and again...God's unflinching pronouncement of full and unilateral forgiveness....and taking forgiveness himself into our very bodies at this table...the word proclaimed into our situations and into our world....living together.....sharing our lives with one another....it becomes a gospel pattern....death...and life....losing our life....finding our life....like the waves crashing in the rhythm of the ocean...flowing from that pool of mercy.....**

**Slowly we can loosen our grip on our life....our possessions....our idea of success....loosen our grip on the**

*ideal....so many of us are in bondage to....loosen our grip on the notion of rugged individualism....or the narrative of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps....that robs us....again and again....loosen our grip on the myth of our own immortality.... In loosening our grip on those things we die....a thousand deaths a day.....*

Trusting that God...our God...this God who is in our midst will create a new future for us as vast as God's own love for each one of us and this whole wide world....and new life will be created again and again....and we will find in this new life....created out of that death we have freedom to be fully who God made us to be....freedom to give ourselves away for the sake of others....freedom to use all of our gifts to lift each other up...not tear each other down....freedom to live...without the guilt of our sins or our past....freedom to see beyond our own perspectives...freedom to use our privilege to amplify other voices...that have been muffled for too long....freedom to lift our eyes up and notice those around us....freedom to be the body of Christ in the world....Freedom to be the children of God that we became in our baptism....And we find our life.....the life of Jesus Christ, living in and through us.....losing our life....then becomes a

joy....because we know that Jesus's life is waiting just around the corner...and we hear that call to die...as a relief.....because out of death....always comes resurrection....to find you life....you have to lose it....to live you have to die...just a fair warning.....right there....you might just find freedom.... When you lose your life....you just might find it....when you die...you will live.....

It was in the air....that same air where the scent of marlboro and folgers coexisted...with styrofoam cups in hand.... you just could sense it.....you *knew* it....I've seen it in my dad.....when you lose your life...you'll find it....when you die....you will live....there was freedom....I bet you've seen it.....maybe you know it?

It's in this air here too.....wherever the word of God is heard and received....and the children of God reside even if we are not sitting in those creaky metal chairs....you can sense it....you know it....you can trust it....it is God's rock solid promise....lose your life....you will find it....die and you will live....



.....the one who gives *life to the dead*....and who *calls into existence things that do not exist*...That is our God.....and in this God's life...in this God's hands.....you are found again.....