



ROMANS 13:8-14

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

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Scripture Passage

Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Sermon

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

Are we merely creatures who react to our most basic impulses? Or are we a species capable of going above and beyond these impulses? Do our impulses control us, or do we have the power to determine how we live? This is the basic issue in today's passage, and I believe it's the greatest issue facing us today.

Christ vs. Flesh

St. Paul viewed human existence as a cosmic battle between these two forces: the side of us connected with the Spirit that leads us closer to divine image, and the side driven by impulse.

In today's passage alone, there are numerous polarities: *Awake vs. Sleep, Night vs. Day, and Works of Darkness vs. Armour of Light.*

In the last verse, he says this: ***"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh."***

(Romans 13:14) Christ vs. flesh. To St. Paul, we are enslaved to the flesh - which he also calls Sin - and



inside of us rages a battle to be freed from the power that it holds over us.

Brain science shows us that we have developed a part of the brain unique to human beings - that can make sound, rational decisions. It's the part that can organize, reflect, empathize and seek the welfare of others. It's the part that elevates our imagination to envision new possibilities for community and harmony. It's the side that leads us closer to the divine image.

But there is an older, more primitive, but very powerful part of the brain we share in common with other species: the very instinctual, fight or flight part of the brain that's concerned with our survival. It's the part of the brain that seeks self-preservation and kicks into high gear when any threat or danger is perceived. It's also the part of the brain that seeks pleasure.

St. Paul didn't have the benefit of modern day brain science, but if he did, I think he would say that the story of human beings has at the core been a battle between these two parts of our natures that's hardwired in our brains.

In today's passage he says this: ***"You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep."* (Romans 13:11)**

He is saying that we've been asleep in a mindless existence of being driven by our impulses - this more primitive yet powerful lower nature of our brains. If circumstances are good and steady, then we mindlessly seek out pleasure and comfort. When times get tough, our fear and anxiety kick in, and we seek self-preservation. In many ways, it is so much easier to live mindlessly, because our impulses are in the driver's seat and make all the decisions for us. We don't have to think and struggle.

Driven by the Self

But we are seeing the cost of this kind of mindless existence. We see how we have mindlessly created a society that is unjust and inequitable, where all people do not get to live with equal dignity. We have created a society in which some have succeeded greatly in amassing privilege and resources, while others have been left behind and are kept there. We have sought our own comfort and well-being without paying heed



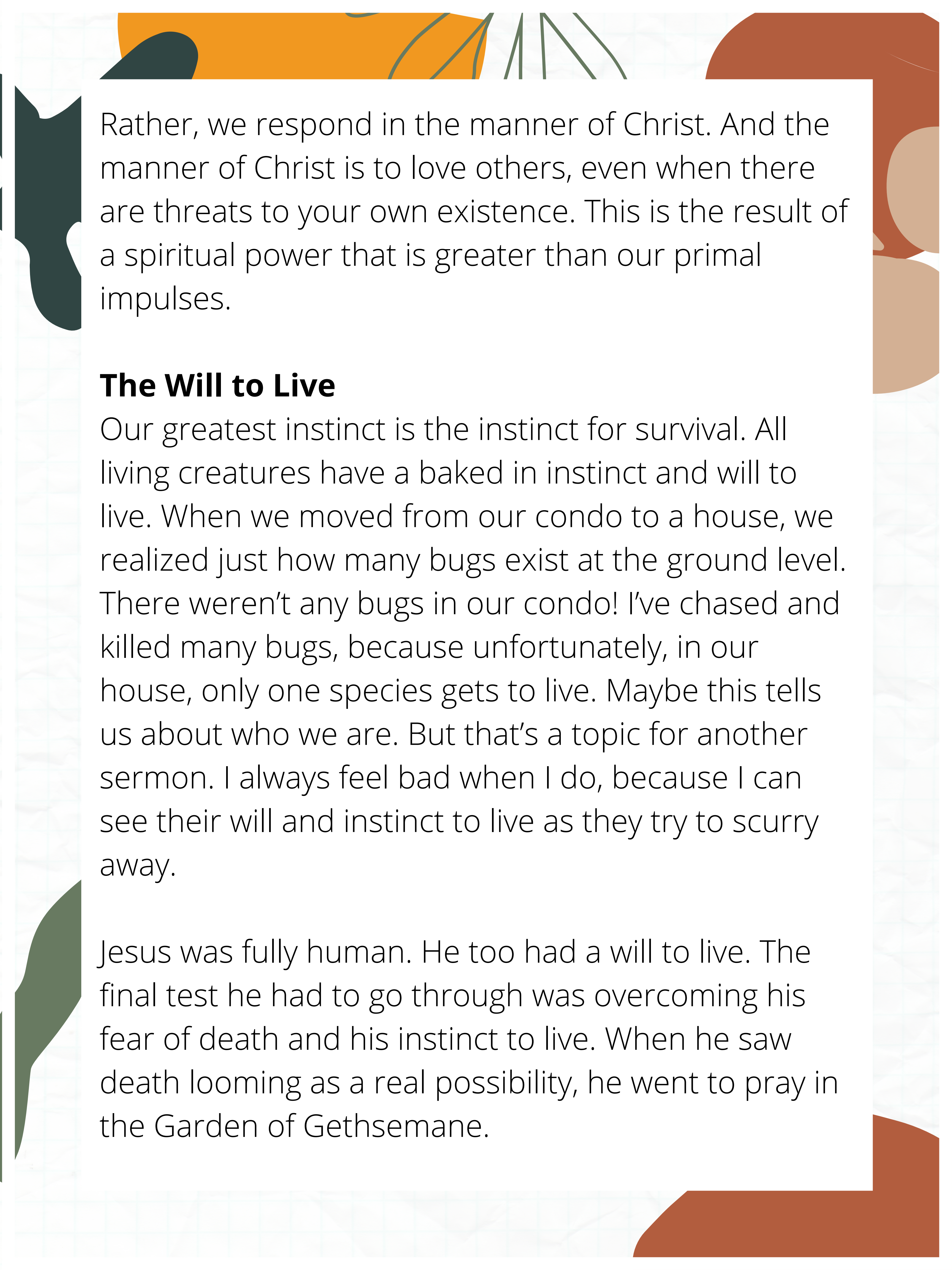
to how others are being affected by our choices.

You know what the real issue is with a mindless existence driven by impulse? The focus is always on you. It is the impulse for your own survival, for your own pleasure, that drives you. We are driven by the self. I seek pleasure for myself, regardless of what you're going through. But, if I am scared, I will seek to preserve myself even at your expense.

What we are seeing in the news is emotion-driven impulse drowning out the higher natures of ourselves. There is so much fear. Fear of family members getting sick. Fear of being shot for the colour of their skin. Fear of losing their way of life. We know that fear often leads to anger. And this anger is swelling up into literal fires and acts of violence.

Driven by the Spirit of Christ

St. Paul tells us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this is to be driven not by my impulse, but by the Spirit of Christ. To put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to be driven by spiritual, rather than primal impulses. When we have the Spirit of Christ in us, we don't instinctively react to our impulses.



Rather, we respond in the manner of Christ. And the manner of Christ is to love others, even when there are threats to your own existence. This is the result of a spiritual power that is greater than our primal impulses.

The Will to Live

Our greatest instinct is the instinct for survival. All living creatures have a baked in instinct and will to live. When we moved from our condo to a house, we realized just how many bugs exist at the ground level. There weren't any bugs in our condo! I've chased and killed many bugs, because unfortunately, in our house, only one species gets to live. Maybe this tells us about who we are. But that's a topic for another sermon. I always feel bad when I do, because I can see their will and instinct to live as they try to scurry away.

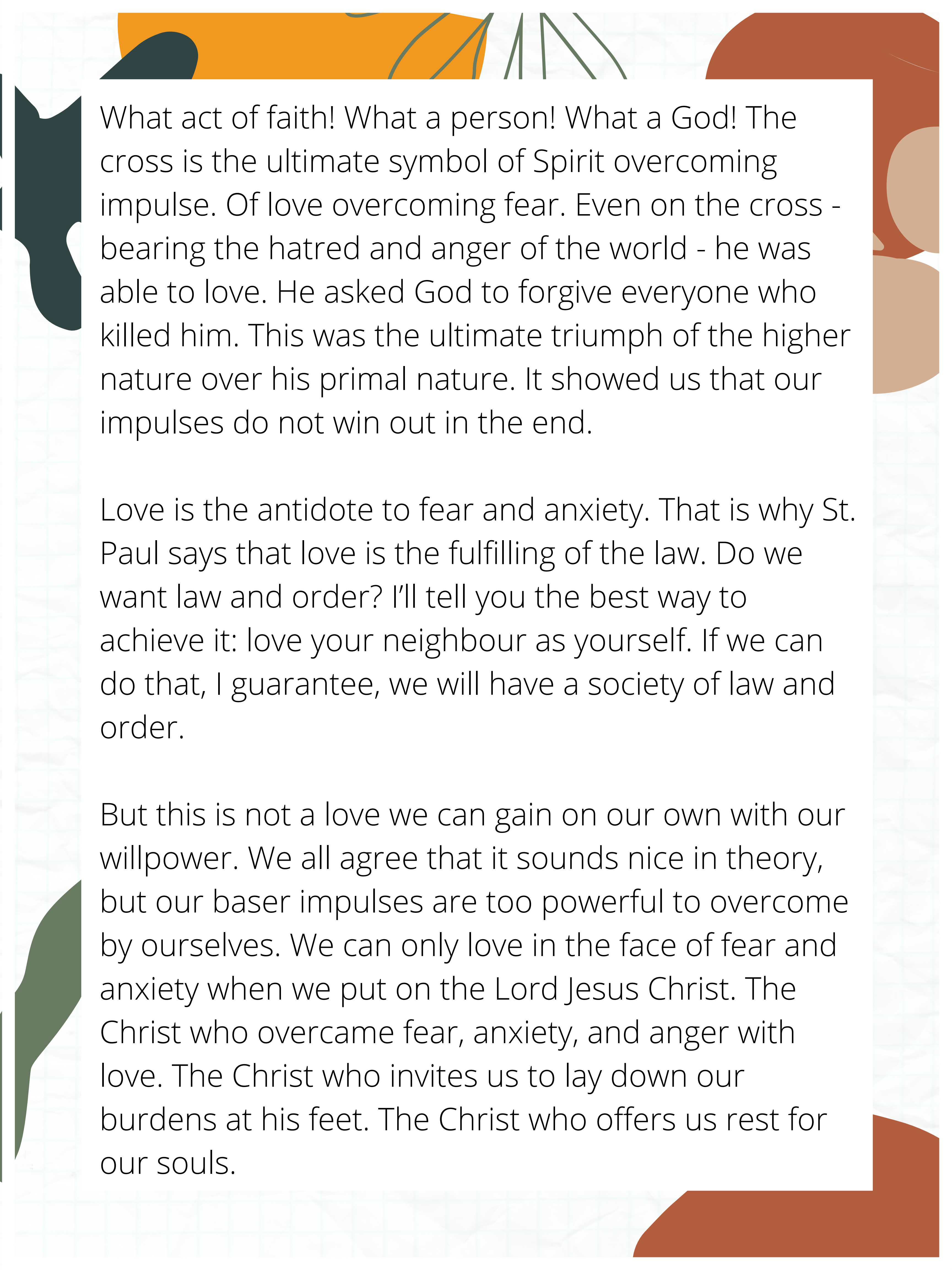
Jesus was fully human. He too had a will to live. The final test he had to go through was overcoming his fear of death and his instinct to live. When he saw death looming as a real possibility, he went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He shared with his disciples: ***"I am deeply grieved, even to death."* (Matthew 26:38).** He then prayed: ***"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."* (Matthew 26:39).** In other words, "Please don't make me die." He prayed this three times. In the Bible, three is used to indicate many. This was a deep struggle that Jesus went through. Luke is even more dramatic: ***"In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."* (Luke 22:44).**

In our post-resurrection faith, we often forget how much Jesus anguished. He did not want to die. He wanted to live. But in the end, he submitted himself to God: ***"Yet not what I want, but what you want... your will be done."* (Matthew 26:39, 42).** In other words, he was able to escape the clutches of his survival instinct, and give himself to his higher calling. This higher calling was to love others and give himself for those who suffered in this world.

Love Overcomes Fear

This was an incredible act of faith. It was an act of courage. He had faith in God's will, even in death.



What act of faith! What a person! What a God! The cross is the ultimate symbol of Spirit overcoming impulse. Of love overcoming fear. Even on the cross - bearing the hatred and anger of the world - he was able to love. He asked God to forgive everyone who killed him. This was the ultimate triumph of the higher nature over his primal nature. It showed us that our impulses do not win out in the end.

Love is the antidote to fear and anxiety. That is why St. Paul says that love is the fulfilling of the law. Do we want law and order? I'll tell you the best way to achieve it: love your neighbour as yourself. If we can do that, I guarantee, we will have a society of law and order.

But this is not a love we can gain on our own with our willpower. We all agree that it sounds nice in theory, but our baser impulses are too powerful to overcome by ourselves. We can only love in the face of fear and anxiety when we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christ who overcame fear, anxiety, and anger with love. The Christ who invites us to lay down our burdens at his feet. The Christ who offers us rest for our souls.

Uncertain Times

As we enter the fall, there is so much to be uncertain about. I know that parents are very stressed out about the start of school. Students are entering a strange new phase of online classes and disrupted social lives. There is a lot of fear, anger and finger-pointing going on.

Let us clothe ourselves with Christ. Let us get on our knees and ask the Lord to be with us, to not leave us. Let ask Christ, who overcame fear with love, to help us do the same.

To the people of St. Andrew's Humber Heights: this is the last Sunday we are doing joint worship. It has been such a joy and delight worshipping with you. You are entering a new season in your life as a community. I pray that God's hand lead you. I pray that any stresses and anxieties that might lead to tensions and conflicts be overcome by the love of Christ. May you too all put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we all enter this new and uncertain season, let us not let fear and anxiety drive how we live. Let us lay them down at the feet of Christ. Let us all put on Christ and let love be our way of life.