

[1 **Monsters**] Our culture loves monsters, we have glamorized vampires since 1897 Bram Stoker's Dracula. We love Interview with the vampire, blade, and twilight. We love for them to sparkle and be cute so we can put them on our t shirts. Now thankfully I was introduced to vampires before the Twilight series, so I am team "vampires don't sparkle". And I know I am not the only one in the room that finds vampires fascinating. Zombies may be the big thing now, but we all know vampires are still pretty sweet.

It's actually kind of weird that we like vampires. If we think about what vampires really are we can see they are actually pretty scary. They don't like sunlight, water, or garlic. You're talking about a being that transforms into various beasts from bats, to wolves, to a bat human hybrid and DOESN'T eat ITALIAN FOOD!! But most importantly, a vampire is a being that survives by drinking blood. A vampire lives by draining other people's lives.

So why do we find vampires so fascinating? In this series we are introducing Monsters. The reason every culture, including our own, tells monster stories is because monsters are externalizations of our fears about ourselves. There is comfort in working out the worst parts of ourselves in an imaginary tale or story. Today we are talking about Vampires. What truth about ourselves is so scary that we would rather tell a vampire story than face it?

[2 **Vampire = Taker**] A vampire is a creature that lives by draining other people's life. We all know people like that. They may not have fangs, but we know people that are takers and controllers. People who leave the room and everyone collapses. We all have a vampire in our lives even if some of us aren't very good at spotting them.

Real vampires are harder to spot than what we might think. They don't all sparkle in the sunlight, wear capes, or transform into bats in front of us. We can start with the signs of what it might look like to see a real life vampire. One of the people who drives others away. Maybe that one guy or gal at work that has every conversation beginning and ending all about them. Maybe you have them saved in your phone as "Don't Answer" or "run away". Maybe this is the person you see coming and you have to take a deep breath to prepare yourself.

"Real" vampires are more exhausting than scary. What really terrifies us if we are honest is the possibility we are vampires. None of us wants to be saved in the phone as "Don't Answer". None of us wants to be the one that makes people collapse when we leave the room. None of us want to be the ones always taking, never giving time to others, never giving attention to others, we all know this is a lonely life.

How do I know if I am a vampire? After all I eat garlic toast all the time and I'm fine! But If we are truly being honest we all see our selfish tendencies. How often do we think about this? What percentage of our conversations are about us? How often do we use I or Me?

No wonder we prefer vampire stories. No wonder vampires avoid mirrors. No one wants to see the scary truth that we take more than we give. But we're all selfish. So how can we combat the vampire that lives in us? Well from what we know from the movies and the vampire lore is that the best way to defeat and stop vampires is... the cross.... and that's good news!!!

[3 **Scared Vampire**] As crazy as it might sound to us, the cross is the best defense against vampires, but I would bet not in the ways we think.

Maybe you are not the vampire, maybe you just love a vampire, or live with one. We all know we can't control other people. If we know a vampire, the best we can do is limit their access to

us (we'll come back to that in a bit). But if we have some vampiric tendencies, well then there IS something we can do about THAT. If it turns out you're a vampire, I've got some good news for you - the cross isn't death for you. It's actually LIFE.

[4 Cross?] So: why the cross? Why is the symbol of death used to combat death? The mystery at the heart of Christian faith is that death brings life. The cross is the symbol of God's self-giving love that brings life for us from death. The cross is the opposite of vampirism.

So how is that good news for all us vampires?

It's good because the cross kills the vampire within us so that the human can live. So that God's Spirit can make us alive. The cross invites us to die with Jesus so that the Spirit can give us new life. Through the cross, we become givers, participants in God's self-giving love.

[Scripture Slide] If you have your bibles turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5:15-20. If you have one of our bibles from the back it is on page XXXX. If you don't have a bible we want you to take that as a gift from us.

This letter was written by Paul to the church he planted in the Greek city of Corinth. Since he's left, another group of Christians has come in trying to shame Paul and impose a legalistic version of Christianity on the Corinthians. In this letter, Paul has been defending himself, explaining why he gives everything he has to serving God.

As we read this together, you'll see Paul doesn't talk about vampires. But he does talk about the new life God offers us through the cross.

If your bible looks a little different today it is because I am reading out of the message. As I was preparing this sermon I appreciated the way the message translated this passage.

Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own. Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. -- 2 Corinthians 5:15-20 The Message

Paul says when God gives us new life, what he calls the "resurrection life", we're not living on our own anymore. Another translation renders it that "we no longer live for ourselves". God's new life isn't selfish. It's not taking. It's anti-vampire according to Paul.

What does Paul mean by that? What is this "resurrection life" on the other side of the cross? This is where a lot of us get it wrong. If I had taken a poll on the way in, asked "What do you think life with God is all about?" what answers do you think I would've gotten?

Read your bible. Pray. Go to church. Maybe give money. Or fast. Or try to be good.

You know what all of those have in common? They're all about doing things that make God happy with us. They're all about THIS (NOW bring in the up and down motion) relationship. [5 Up/Down relationship - silhouette with 2 other silhouettes, but with RED arrow to God not each other]

And that makes sense, doesn't it? What does life with God look like? It's all about taking care of THIS (the up/down). We spend a lot of time trying to keep God happy.

But according to Paul, is that what resurrection life is all about? Let's look back at what he said. Let's see if Paul agrees with us....

Anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life begins! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins.

Paul verifies that there is a relationship going on with God. That there is this (Up and down), but that God has *already reconciled it*. That means it's done. Handled. [6 Up/Down is good] There is not this rules and regulations, you do *this* to receive *this*. He clearly says "The old life is gone; a new life begins! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him." So the cross has already settled the relationship. It has brought us in communion with God. He has given to us already. Wow!!! That is a totally different perspective. So I have to read my Bible to have a relationship with God? NO God already took care of it. Pray 3x/day? NO. Go to church every week? NO.

GOD. Already. Handled. It. On. The. Cross.

Why do we do all these things in church then? Why does Catalyst have a spiritual practice guide? Why do we emphasize volunteering our time at life message? This (up and down) is already taken care of so why bother? Spiritual practices keep us connected to God. They are how we participate in Jesus' death on the cross. They kill the vampire in us and draw us into the self-giving love of God. We don't read our Bibles to keep God from being mad at us. Scripture draws us into God's story. We don't pray to earn a spiritual merit badge. Prayer tunes our day to the rhythm of God's kingdom. We don't give to buy God's favor. We give because God gives, and we're imitating the divine love we've received.

We don't do spiritual practices to keep God happy. That's hard to get our minds around because our world just doesn't do free grace. In the world of vampires, we must take life to live. You have to take to survive. It's hard to believe God doesn't work the same way.

But is that what Paul said? What I heard Paul say is that "it's settled". No way is God expecting you to climb all these ladders, jump through these hoops. God settled it. Paul reveals to us the very nature of God that God is not a "taker" [7 God equals VAMPIRE] (Pause). The full nature of God is to give. That's who God is. So if we don't have to worry about (up and down motion) because God settled it...

...Then what are we supposed to do?

Paul tells us:

God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

[8 Side Relationships] Paul says when we participate in this (up/down), our job becomes this (side to side). We are ambassadors. We are representatives of God, telling people about the cross-life God is offering them. What is more important to God praying 3xs a day (up and down) or spending time with our family? What is more important coming to church every Sunday (up and down) or knowing our neighbors? What is more important reading our bible (up and down) or how I behave at work? We are at church we know the right answer is this (up and down) right? Except Paul said God has already settled it. This (up/down) frees us to focus on this (side to side).

That feels so wrong doesn't it? It feels so unspiritual. BUT.... Imagine if everyone in this room focused on (side to side) this. Imagine if everyone in this room focused on being that ambassador, that picture of God's self-giving love to the people in our lives this week.

What would our world be like, how much would our families, neighborhoods, or schools change if we gave like God?

When I worked at Pepsi I saw this all around me. In fact I was a participant. I understood this (up and down). It is part of the corporate agenda, move up as high as you can no matter who you step on. Take care of your boss and they will take care of you. It launched my career being one of the youngest most successful managers Pepsi had. When I got on top I wasn't satisfied and it didn't ever quite feel right.

Eventually I left Pepsi, found a new boss, a new company. None of them cared what I had done. As I focused on this (side to side) and became a team player my work became life giving. Employees and vendors love to work with me. My boss loves to pour into me. Everything we work on even if it doesn't always turn out good or if we don't land the business becomes a success of training, opportunity, or future successes. I have a relationship with my boss that isn't this (up and down), but is this (sign of the cross).

[9 Side is Good] *This* (side to side) is how we announce the Good news.... This is how we take part in the work Jesus started. The best thing we can do to fight vampirism is to follow the way of the cross. Following the way of the cross kills the vampire inside us so the human can flourish.

[10 Vampire Friend] That leaves the question we had earlier. What if I love or live with a vampire? Do I just roll over and let them suck the life out of me? Do I just give them whatever they need to survive?

A difficult question because it involves boundaries. Again, vampires stories give us a clue. For some strange reason, these ultra-powerful beings can't enter a house unless they're invited in. They are super-strong, immortal, can hypnotize people and turn into animals, but they can't come inside? Weird. Kind of dumb. Until we remember that vampire stories are really about us.

If there's a vampire in your life, you have to quit inviting it into "your house". Does that mean we don't have relationship or we can't interact? No of course not, you just don't let them into your house where they can take and take and take. How far do you let the vampire into your life? Maybe you only hang out with them in groups. Or you give yourself permission not to answer their calls. Maybe the first step is admitting to yourself that they *are* a vampire and you need to uninvite them in. Give more of your energies to relationships that are life *giving*, not life *taking*.

So for the vampires in our lives, the ones we love, we must set healthy boundaries if we love them. If we love them and want them to stay in our lives we need to stop inviting them in.

Friends, we live in a world of vampires who just take and take. This week, let Catalyst be a people who welcomes the cross into our lives. (sign of the cross). Let's be a people who participates in Jesus' death (up/down) so the vampires in us can die and the Spirit can breathe new life in us. And let's take that new life to the world around us (side/side).

[9 Side is Good] What would your marriage be like this week if you were more concerned with what you are *giving* your spouse rather than what you're *getting*? What could our streets or apartment complexes be like if we spent some time caring for our neighbors? What would our work places be like if we put our coworkers first? What would our relationships look like if the vampires in us died so we were free to give and give and give?

Christ's call to us is to stop the taking and to be ambassadors of giving (side to side). For us to be life, to give life, and to take life where there was once death.

Communion Set Up

Communion is one way we can participate in the cross. This meal points us back to the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died. He gave them bread and wine, telling us they were his body broken and his blood poured out for us. This meal reminds us that God has already handled this (up and down). And we eat wafers dipped in juice today to participate in his death (up/down) so that we might become a community of givers and ambassadors of the cross. By receiving this grace we are saying no to the takers and yes to being a community of givers. You don't have to be a part of catalyst to receive communion today. If you want to be a part of a cross community a people who give not take, come join us.

[prayer of consecration]

God,

You have gathered us here today to hear this good news: that we were not created to take and take and take. Thank you for showing us by your death on the cross that we do not have to be a community of takers. Thank you for showing us that we don't have to work to please you because you have already restored our relationship with you.

We approach this table today as a people formed by our culture to be vampires, takers. We approach as a people tired of feeling drained all the time. In these wafers and juice, may we find a spiritual food that nourishes us and brings us back to life. May we feel your Holy Spirit breathing the breath of life back into our lungs and restoring our humanity to us.

May we leave from this table fully alive. May we return to the world as your people, formed in your self-giving image. May we be a breath of fresh air to all the vampires in our lives who need your life to wake them up as well.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son Jesus.

Benediction

If you are new with us today we know how hard it can be to get connected. So we have designed an event just for you. We have the newcomers lunch. The next one is October 19 you come to second service then stay after, we get you out in 45 minutes, we feed you, talk to you about who we are, what Catalyst is doing, and most importantly what your easy next step is to get connected. Catalyst as we go to our workplaces, our homes, and anywhere else this week may we be ambassadors of the cross and give (side to side) this week. Go in his grace and peace we'll see you next week!