

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT A Romans 5:1-8 “Who Does Christ Save? Weak, Ungodly Sinners! That’s Us”

After church you see an out-of-control speeding truck barreling down Route 3. You also see a person in the street unaware of the impending impact. Who would that person have to be for you instantly to react by rushing into the street and pushing that person out of way but taking hit yourself? Your spouse? Your child? Your parent? Your sibling? Your best friend? Any young child? Without even thinking you would rush into harm’s way in order to save such a person.

For others we might be concerned but not so sacrificial. If it were a neighbor, an acquaintance, or a stranger we just might yell a warning, “watch out, get out of way!” But is there someone in this world, some dirty rotten scoundrel, whom we would see about to be run over by that speeding truck and think, “it serves him right, he deserves it”? Maybe if we could personify the Corona virus we would say, “he’s getting what is coming to him.”

That person in the street about to be run down is each one of us. That speeding truck is death driven by the devil on the road of human existence. Even though our every action by nature is contrary to His will and we don’t deserve His defense, our Almighty God acts to save us. The Son of God Jesus Christ rushes to our rescue. He throws us out of the way to safety and takes our death upon Himself; not death not by truck, but by crucifixion. God shows His great love for us in that Jesus Christ died for us, sinful though we are, so that we now have life and peace with God.

I. We Are Ungodly and Weak

Perhaps you have those days where your children act just opposite way that you want them to act and tell them to behave. Is it just me or does this ever happen to you? You say, “clean your room” and they mess up another one. You say, “take out the trash” and they lie on the couch and watch television. You say, “do your homework” and they play video games on their cell phones. You say one thing and they do something totally different. That when you see how much your children take after your spouse’s side of family. This gives us an idea of how we treat God.

He says one thing and we do the opposite. He wants what is best for us but we think we know ourselves and our life better than He does. God gives us everything we have and we take, use and abuse His blessings without thanking Him or considering others in their needs. The word Paul uses for our natural condition is “ungodly.” We are anti-God, the opposite of God. What God wants for us we reject and all that we by nature want is contrary to God’s will for us.

Paul also describes our natural condition as being “weak.” Spiritually we are powerless to change our natural condition. We cannot work to earn our salvation. We cannot make ourselves alive in God’s sight. Our rebellion against God is more than a disease of the soul, more than a virus that is contagious and more than a paralysis of the spirit. Our rebellion against God is a killer of our minds, spirits and bodies. We want everything that is contrary to God. There is nothing we can do on our own to change that nature. The ultimate punishment for our sin is to live forever as the ungodly people we want to

live as now, but to do so totally apart from God. That is to live with no benefit of God's presence, with no enjoyment of God's blessings, and with no hope of God's relief.

II. Christ Died For Us

A. We Are Justified By Faith

At the time of our text and at this time of our lives, all that bad stuff is in our past. A major and fundamental change has taken place. The difference is the death of God's own Son Jesus Christ. He is holy where we are ungodly. He has power where we are weak. He suffered our punishment even though we had deserved that wrath. In Jesus our God came into our human life to take upon Himself the death we should have died. He did so not because we are so worthy, or because we try so hard or because we passed a test. He did so because of His love for us helpless sinners.

Jesus' death was temporary in human time but eternal in its spiritual results. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross gives us life that has no end. The word of the text that describes this act of God is "grace." This is a gift freely given to us at no cost to us with the price paid for us by Jesus. The word of the text that describes our response to God's grace is faith, receiving that gift, believing it is for us and trusting it to work for our good.

B. We Have Peace With God

The result of Jesus' sacrifice in our place is that now we have peace with God. No longer do we live in sinful conflict with our holy God. Instead of working against God in all that we think, say, do, we now are on God's side, desiring His will and wanting His way in our lives. Instead of being outside of God's kingdom looking in, we are now members of God's family and part of His eternal kingdom.

The way into this fellowship with God and His people is His Son living in our human flesh, Jesus the Christ. The doorway from the dark side of sin's wall and into the light of God's grace is in the shape of Christ's cross. Jesus is the access we have to our Creator; because of Jesus no longer are we objects of God's wrath but recipients of His peace.

C. We Are Saved Through Jesus' Life

But we cannot speak of Jesus' death in our place and leave Him cold in the tomb. A dead and buried Jesus would do us no good. It is a living Lord that we worship. Jesus threw Himself in front of that on-rushing truck of death not just to be a one-time hero for us to remember, but to be our Savior, to spare us from a death that lasts forever. Jesus has risen from the dead; He lives and rules in heaven; there He pleads for us before our heavenly Father. Because Jesus lives we have the forgiveness of our sins. Because Jesus lives we, too, shall live after our death.

III. We Rejoice in Hope

A. We Have God's Holy Spirit

God already has given us a downpayment of this eternal life. The first deposit He has made into us is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism. Then through our reading and hearing of God's Word and receiving of the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit strengthens us in faith and life. With the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives comes God's gifts of love and hope.

We have love for others because we have a God who loves us fully, freely, and sacrificially even though we did not deserve that love. Our hope that is more than wishful thinking. Our hope of eternal life is sure and certain because as baptized believers in Jesus we already are living that life now. We can be so confident of this life because our hope rests in the God who is true and faithful to His promises.

B. We Have Hope Even in Suffering

This hope of forgiveness, life and salvation is ours even when, humanly speaking, the wheels are coming off of our lives. Times of sadness, pain and suffering still afflict us. Can we say "corona virus?" It is inconvenient for all, serious for some, and, sadly, deadly for a few. This world says that any suffering is terrible, that we should not go through suffering, and that we should avoid suffering at all costs. Have a headache? Take a pill. Feel sore muscles? Rub on some ointment. Have a cold? Drink some medicine. Feel sick? Get a shot.

Such avoidance of bodily pain has convinced an entire generation of humanity that they should have no suffering at all. We think that a bad hair day should be overcome by smoking a joint or snorting a line of cocaine just to avoid feeling any pain. So it is contrary to our culture, but faithful to God for Paul to say and for us to confess, "we rejoice in our sufferings." As baptized believers in Jesus we bear a cross. That is the trouble this world gives us because we trust in Jesus as our Savior. But it is through these troubles that we develop our spiritual endurance and grow in our Christian character. Through the sufferings of this life we appreciate more fully the certain hope of life and salvation that God gives us in His Son Jesus Christ.

At just the right time, when we could do nothing about our natural sinful condition that leads to death, Jesus took our place and died for us. In doing so Jesus turned us, by nature enemies of God, into the holy people of God. Now we are the recipients of God's love, grace and hope. We are members of God's family with the gift of His Holy Spirit who is God's guarantee of our new and eternal life. To God alone be all the glory! AMEN