

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Second Sunday After Pentecost

June 14, 2020

PSALM 100 (ESV)

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

A Psalm for giving thanks.

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

2 Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

3 Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

5 For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

FIRST READING: Exodus 19:2-8 (ESV)

²They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain,³ while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

⁷So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.⁸All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

EPISTLE: Romans 5:6-15 (ESV)

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but

sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-20) (ESV)

³⁵And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

¹⁰And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. ²The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

⁹Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. ¹¹And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

¹⁶“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Sermon 23 – Second Sunday After Pentecost

“God's Good”

Romans 5:6-15

Dear friends,

Paul in Romans highlights the center and comfort of the Gospel, and despite the fact that this is just about as straightforward as our faith gets, it still needs to be upheld. Remember that Christianity is not always about learning something new, but about re-embracing that which is known,

refreshing our memories and souls alike. In this lesson we are reminded of the stakes, we are reminded of the treasure, and we are reminded of how out-of-our-world God is and the way He thinks is. These are all good things, and we'll get to all of them.

This is, as I said, the center of the Gospel, and the center of Paul's Gospel specifically. What do I mean by that? Romans is Paul, it is everything Paul has learned over a very memorable lifetime serving both sides of the covenant. Paul describes himself in other places as a Pharisee beyond Pharisees, the ultimate incarnation of that particular party. He took the Old Testament God had passed to the Jews so seriously he was willing to kill for it, he indeed oversaw and instigated the death of Stephen the Martyr when Stephen seemed to be speaking against it. As a Christian preacher, Paul took Jesus and Jesus' work just as seriously, and Romans is the summary of that all. This book is 16 chapters of Paul's lifetime of learning about God, everything He has pieced together, experienced, and studied for. It is nothing else, and that makes it especially memorable. Romans is a good place to start if you have virtually any question about Jesus. In the chapters before this, Paul has discussed, in painful detail, all that sin means to the human race. He has begun talking about Jesus and what Jesus did, systematically, step-by-step as Romans often reads. In the midst of that, during this discussion of Jesus, we have this epistle reading.

“6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the Gospel. This is the good news, flatly stated. We were once enemies of God. That is what sin means and that is what sin produces in us. Rebellion, misunderstanding, idolatry. That did not and could not change until God Himself did something about it. God did something about it, He sent His son to die for the ungodly, to die for us.

God did not do this because He foresaw something good in us. God did not do this because we deserved it in any fashion. I know you all know this, but it is so easy to fall into that trap. God looked at us, at our entire species, and He saw us dedicated to worshiping anything else but Him. Dedicated to doing anything except the right thing. Dedicated to propping up men, institutions, and ultimately, ourselves above God. That's what He saw, because that's what we were. God saw the irredeemable, teeming swarm of humanity and He said to Himself, I'm going to save them. Instead of destroying us, He took the long, hard road of making us holy again.

That is how God thinks, and it is beyond alien. This is not how we think. We think of our

enemies as enemies, the very word puts ugly pictures in your head. Think of it. We do not like to think we have enemies, and perhaps some of you don't, but you all have people you deeply, profoundly dislike. Furthermore, most of you probably have someone who has hurt you, deeply, profoundly, that kind of bottomless hurt that still scars you, still weeps blood in your psyche. It may get scabbed over, but something about that wound never fully heals. Think of *that* person, that did that to you. Would you die to make that person better? Would you die to save them? Would you hurt your children, your spouse, your brothers and sisters and parents and friends, to save them? I wouldn't. Not in a million years. God did. He did exactly that. He took one look at human beings He loathed for their rebellion, their iniquity, and He made them His. He made them different, redeemed, redeemable.

Paul goes on. **“9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”** Instead of wrath, instead of God's anger toward our very real sins, we are loved instead, because of that sacrifice of Christ. God dedicated His son to dying for us, and in that it changed us, and it changed how we are seen by God. His blood justifies all we do, all we have ever done. It justifies the lies, the anger, the callousness, the lack of forgiveness, the lack of kindness, the unthankfulness. Oh, the unthankfulness, that one hurts me especially.

This is hard to hold onto, hard to appreciate. But look at our world today. It is on fire, and not in a good way. Our country is restive, and that has exploded into violence and death in more than one place. Anger and fear, not kindness and compassion, are ruling our streets. Violence begets violence, not peace or harmony. The spectre of plague looms behind it all, a death that seems so random it defies all attempts to control or treat. Paul reminds us why all this is, and what it all means, which he talks about in verse 12. **“12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”**

That is why it is needed. All of the particulars are just that, particulars, they're symptoms of the problem of sin. Paul says that death is reigning over us. Even though our sins aren't like Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, His curse is still ours. We all know that we die, but this is the death of everything

we produce, everything we make. We try to make a society together, and then in the next minute we're tearing it apart. We try to make life, only to watch that life wither to disease. It all comes down to death.

And this is why we need life. The free gift is not like the trespass. Our death is not too big for God's life, and that is the true gift of Jesus. The life that He gives is the life everlasting, and that is not just a matter of heaven, it is a thing that starts and ends with forgiveness. All of this has been redeemed from that death. Everything we are, everything we create, Jesus has taken it all to His cross to die and rise. What does that mean? It means that many have died, much evil has been done, but God is doing good, right now. He is doing good to His children through Jesus and through the faith in Jesus that He gives. We do not always see that good, but we do hear it, and we hear it in these words.

It is not something we have because we are good, it is something we have because God is good, and that means it will always be. Man hates, God loves. Man hurts, God helps. Man forsakes, God embraces. He embraces you. We need to be redeemed, and we have been. If redemption means life, and Paul spends most of this chapter talking about that, then that reminds us that it is our life. This world, crude, broken matter that it is, isn't life in the true sense of the world. It's a pantomime, a bad comedy. I know. Too much has happened, too much has changed, it's deeply unsettling to watch.

Paul reminds us that this is to drive us to our knees. This is to remind us that what we live in, here on Earth right now, is living death, not a life worth living. All the unrest, the sickness, the wars and rumors of wars, remind us that time is short, and that our sin is no more forgivable or acceptable in God's sight than any other. You want to help? Get on your knees, repent, remember that you are everything that makes you angry. Want it to be better? Make yourself better by bringing to God all the ways that you aren't, all the ways that you have sinned. Want to keep your family safe? Give them a future? It starts with admitting that you aren't the future, God is. Through that repentance, God works the righteousness that He seeks within you. He works through you and will work through you, when the time comes. Christians fight evil by bringing evil to Christ, and Paul reminds us that evil starts at home. Within us.

But if our evil created this world of death, God's good lavishes on us a world of life. An eternity of it. That eternity begins in your heart today. He will make it so.

Amen.