

June 8, 2008
Pentecost 4

"The Ultimate Example of Love"

ROMANS 5:6-11

Dou see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

If you take Miller Street to downtown Santa Maria be careful when you come to the stop signs at Betteravia and Stowell. These busy intersections now have video cameras that take a picture of people going through a red light or failing to stop completely before making a right turn on red. You won't be able to talk your way out of a ticket because the evidence is on the camera. The traffic fine will come in the mail. It will have to be paid. Gone are the days of the old speed cops who hid behind billboards with motorcycles.

The almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, knows everything that goes on your life and mine, even our secret thoughts. Nothing escapes his all seeing eye. On the day of judgment there will be more than enough evidence to convict us. The book of Romans sums up our lives with these chilling words, "There is none who does good, no not one."

The God who knows the evil that lurks in every human heart is a righteousness God who must by his very nature as God punish all sin. He is also a God of love. Here in these words just read to you we hear how God demonstrated his love for us by giving us Jesus to die in our place and be punished in our place so we have all of the million pixels of high definition video clips of our sin expunged from the record. Let's look at these words more closely to see this ultimate example of love that has totally changed your life and mine.

We were once so far away

It is amazing that our God would love us, considering how far away we were from him. "You see at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." We were powerless. We were without strength. We were so weak that we could not come up with anything that could get rid of one bad picture or clip from our past life. There is no community service we can perform to clear our record, no deeds of kindness and love, no offers of trying to improve our lives. A lady once told me her favorite part of the Bible was the verse "God helps those who help themselves." That is not in the Bible. It comes from Ben Franklin's *Poor Richards Almanac*. We are totally powerless to help ourselves.

No only are we weak, we are ungodly. "Christ died for the ungodly." The Greek word used here literally says "without God or godless." I am born into this world not wanting God in

my life, not the God that has revealed himself on the pages of the Bible. I want to make up my own God and fashion him after my own understanding, similar to the way the carpenter and goldsmith are described making an idol in the book of Isaiah. A woman named Sheila once expressed her faith with these words, "I believe in God. I can't remember the last time I went to church. But my faith has carried me a long way. It is 'Sheila-ism.' Just my own little voice." I am born with my own little voice that is ungodly. Ephesians 2 says, "At one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." Christ died for the ungodly. How amazing is that.

We appreciate this ultimate love even more as we hear the book of Romans describe how far we wandered from God. It says, "While we were sinners, Christ died for us." The Greek word for sinner means a person who misses the mark or fails to hit the target. Have you ever tried to shoot an arrow like this (show arrow) into a target? Usually the target is set up with bales of hay or straw behind it, because invariably people shoot and not only miss the bull's eye but the entire target itself. In fact when people miss the target they can laugh and joke about it. What if your life depends on hitting the target perfectly every time, one arrow after another in the very center of the target splitting the arrow that went before? Romans 3 says that we have all sinned or missed the mark. But then it goes on to say that missing the mark is falling short of God's glory or his perfection or his expectations. Jesus saw people as they were. He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Without a shepherd, the sheep perish.

To lead us to an even deeper appreciation of God's love that rescued us, we are told that we were once enemies of God. "For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his sin."

Romans 8 tells us that "the sinful mind is hostile towards God." We are born with a certain stubbornness that shows itself in our determination to go our own way, a natural inborn resistance to God's way. This past week I heard of a mother who had to pick up her little daughter from preschool because the daughter had hit her teacher. We have all seen this defiance little children can have towards their parents with the simple word, "No." People hated Jesus because he wanted to save them and rescue them. Jesus came to rescue us when we were enemies who hated him and wanted nothing to do with him.

This past week an elderly man was walking across the street in Hartford, Connecticut, and he was hit by a car. A mounted video camera captured his body flying through the air like a rag doll. It also captured the person who hit him speeding away, others walking by and driving by without stopping. How thankful we can be this morning that our heavenly Father did not ignore us even when we were hostile to the plan he has for rescuing us.

Jesus gave himself to bring us back

Paul tells us that people will give their lives to save a friend or member of a family, but rarely will someone give their life to save someone who is a very bad person. "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man some might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us." James Kidd of Wheaton, Illinois was visiting his son who was stationed at Fort

Bragg. They went to a nearby Italian restaurant to eat. While they were eating a gunman entered the building and began shooting. James Kidd was one of the 11 people who died in that shooting because he jumped between the shooter and his son to shield the child he loved from the bullets. This past week our president awarded the Medal of Honor to a young man who died in Iraq after throwing his body over a grenade that had landed in their Humvee, sparing the lives of four other soldiers. The president quoted from John 15 where Jesus says, "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."

We can understand laying down a life for friend, but an enemy, or someone who hates you? That is what Jesus has done for us. The old sawdust trail evangelist Billy Sunday was fond of saying how Jesus saves the guttermost to the uttermost. As we sing in the hymn, "Chief of sinners though I be Jesus shed his blood for me." Then the hymn goes on in the second verse, "Oh, the height of Jesus' love. Higher than the heaven's above. Deeper than the depths of sea. Lasting as eternity. Love that found me wondrous thought. Found me when I sought him not."

Yes dear friend, Jesus does save the guttermost to the uttermost. Consider the new position that Jesus offers you. "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" We have been justified by his blood. That means that the blood of Jesus pays the ransom price for our sin and declares us not guilty. I talked to a lady who was driving in the LA area on an unfamiliar street. She did not go through an intersection fast enough and the light turned red before she made it through the intersection. She saw the camera flash and a couple weeks later she received the traffic ticket in the mail. There is no way you can argue the case or write a letter saying, "I was lost and I was looking for a street, and did not see the light turn yellow in time." There is no way we can defend ourselves from the sins that are recorded in God's record of our wrongs. That is why it is so comforting to know that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Even the smallest sins of omission that we are not even aware of expunged and deleted from the record. That is why we find great comfort in the words of Psalm 103 that tells us he has removed our sins from us far as the east is from the west.

Being justified, or forgiven produces positive blessings in your every day life. "For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, so shall we be saved through his life." The death and resurrection of Jesus puts us at peace with God. That is why Jesus appeared to his disciples the night of his resurrection and showed them the nail prints in his hands and spoke the words, "Peace be to you." It says the disciples were "overjoyed" to see the Lord. There is so much peace and joy that comes with knowing that God loves you in Jesus, even when you don't deserve this love.

Jesus once told the story of a son who took the money from his future inheritance, went off to distant country and spent it in wild living. After messing up his life terribly he decided to go and tell his father how he had sinned against him. The father welcomed him home with open arms, put a robe on him, sandals on his feet and a ring on his finger. Can you imagine the joy of falling asleep that night with a ring on finger knowing that your father loves you? When you fall asleep at night, you have the privilege of praying "Lord Jesus forgive me of all my sin." You can fall asleep knowing that you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What about the next morning? Think of that young man waking up to the sunlight, the roosters crowing, sleeping in a bed in the home of his father who loves him, still full from all the food from the big feast the night before. Not only does Jesus save us by his death, he also saves us by his life. The risen Lord and Savior stands by your side to work out everything for your good. Even the problems and challenges we face become opportunities as Paul said in Philippians, "For me to live is Christ."

Because of this ultimate love our Father has shown us in his Son we get to rejoice every day in that love. "Not only so but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Think of that son sitting down and having breakfast with his father. No food every tasted better because it was eaten with someone who loves you very deeply. We eat our meals, sleep in our beds, go to our jobs, interact with other people knowing how much our Father loves us. Nothing in our human experience compares to the love you have come to know in your heavenly Father through Jesus. Amen.