

July 6, 2014
Pentecost 4

"The Ultimate Love that Is Yours through Jesus"

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.

Janis was a cute, chubby girl with freckles. In high school the freckles became pimples. She put on more weight and she was different. Kids teased her. To fit in and be accepted she resorted to making fun of herself. It only got worse. She moved to San Francisco. Drugs and alcohol and multiple men in her life made her feel even more unloved. Her music career soared but even then she felt unloved. Southern Comfort was her best friend. At the age of 27 Janis Joplin died from a heroin overdose. If only she could have realized how much God loved her and cared about her.

I am truly honored to stand before you today and tell you that God truly loves you. The evidence of this love is not found in your material possessions or in the number of friends you have or in how well you have tried to live your life. God our Father shows his love for you in the way that he sent Jesus his Son to give his life for you. How true the words are that we just read, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us."

So far removed from God

It is truly amazing that we can say, "I know God loves me" since we were once so far removed from him. God had to bring us close to him because we were powerless. There was no other way. "You, see at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." We were powerless. We were ungodly. The word for powerless has the thought of being sick and tired and weary. When you are sick you don't have the strength to work, or be with people or prepare a meal. You just want to stay in bed and sleep.

Because we are infected with sin from Adam's fall and the results from the sin pop up in our lives, we have no power and no strength to do the right things to make God love us and care about us. We just keep turning out more sin not just by our thoughts and actions but also by what we fail to do. Later in this book of Romans Paul will write, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

A lady once told me her favorite verse in the Bible was "God helps those who help themselves." This verse is not found in the Bible, but it is found in Benjamin Franklin's

book *Poor Richard's Almanac*. We do not have the power to help ourselves or earn God's help. We are corrupted by sin.

Another word that describes how far we are away from God is the word "ungodly." "Christ died for the ungodly." It does not say that we are sometimes ungodly or even frequently ungodly. It says we are just plain ungodly. That means we are not like God. We do not measure up to his standard of righteousness and holiness and purity. As we heard in our sermon last week from Romans 3, "We fall short of the glory of God."

There was once a movie about two guys who were not very smart. The one guy with the buck teeth asked a very pretty girl, "What are the chances that you might go out with me?" She responded to him with disdain in her voice, "About one in a million." He jumped up and down with joy because he at least had a one in a million chance of winning her affection. What is the chance of winning God's favor and God's love by our human effort and performance? It is always zero. Zero times any number is always zero.

There is still another word used here to show us how far we are from God and how much we need Jesus to rescue us. It is the word "enemy." Verse 10 says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..." Romans 8 says, "The sinful (fleshly) mind is hostile to God." I saw some of this hostility a few weeks ago when I invited a man to join us in our Bible study at Santa Maria Terrace. How quickly his smiling face turned to anger as he said, "I have been a Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist. I have had enough of churches and their teachings." But then he ended up coming anyway because a ninety six year old Jewish lady who is coming to our class said to him, "I am Jewish. I enjoy this class. Won't you come with me."

If you want to arouse the anger of people, then tell them the truth that sin is more than just robbing banks and killing people. Tell them sin involves every level of meanness that wells up in the human heart. It involves the idolatry of thinking too much about ourselves and not enough about God. Tell them the consequences of sin are eternal death and punishment in hell. Their anger level will increase even more. But then tell them that God has done everything necessary to save and rescue them through Jesus' death on the cross and they will violently turn against you just as the religious leaders did to Jesus. The human heart is hostile to God and God's plan to rescue us through the death of his Son.

Remember the story that Jesus told about the lost son. That son demanded his share of the family inheritance. He could care less what financial impact that had on his father who loved him. Then he went as far away from home as possible and spent the money in wild living. He could not stand to be in presence of his father who loved him and wanted him as his son. That's where we once were, and that's where we would be today if had not been for God's love that reached out to us and brought us back through Jesus.

Now you are close to God

How can I get close to God? How can I be sure that come loves me? Listen again to this amazing verse of Scripture. "You see, just at the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus died at just the right time. Galatians four tells us "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman." The account of Jesus'

birth in Luke begins with the words, "And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus.." Jesus' birth, Jesus' death, Jesus' resurrection were perfectly timed by our God to accomplish our salvation for us. This past week another rocket was launched successful from Vandenburg Air Force Base. The timing that goes into the launch of a rocket is nothing compared to the perfect timing that went into Jesus dying for the ungodly.

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us." We are impressed when soldiers give their lives for other soldiers. I recently heard some of our soldiers who spent time in Iraq describe how their commanding officer lunged to throw away a bomb that had been launched at them only to be blown up in the process. Soldiers have given their lives so we can celebrate our freedom on the Fourth of July. Jesus has given us his life on the cross for his enemies so we can be free from the sin that will condemn us forever on the last day.

How do I know for sure that Jesus died for me? These words from Romans tell me that Jesus gave his life for sinners. We heard in our gospel reading that Jesus has compassion on people because he sees them as sheep without a shepherd. Have I wandered away from God? Have I sinned against God? Have I been ungodly? Then I know Jesus died for me, for it says Christ died for us while we were sinners, and Christ died for the ungodly. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst." "Chief of sinners tho' I be. Jesus shed his blood for me."

This terrible war between you and your God is now over. Instead of being an enemy of God you are now his own dear child through Jesus. "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him. For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him." We have been justified by the blood of Jesus. Justified means "declared not guilty." We had nothing to do with earning this verdict of not guilty. It was earned for us by Jesus through his precious blood that made the ransom payment for our sin.

Because you have peace with God through Jesus, you are now in this amazing new world where Jesus brings greater joy and meaning to you in your life. It says, "having been reconciled shall we not be saved through his life!" Eternal life is yours because of Jesus, but what of the here and now? What of the years of life he still has remaining on this earth for you? Are we just sitting on the bench waiting for the bus to come and take us home? No, every day is now special because Jesus has not only saved us from something terrible but has also saved us for something very special.

In John 15 Jesus says he is the vine and we are the branches. His life, his death and his resurrection give us new lives in which we bear fruit for him. In verse 10 of that chapter Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete." So when someone asks you the question, "Did you have fun today?" you can say, "Yes I did because I was saved by Jesus, and I am being saved, and I will be saved on the last day." Roll over in bed at night, drive in the car to work, eat your breakfast, talk to your friends. 24/7 the risen Lord Jesus Christ is praying for you and interceding for you. That's living life to the full because of Jesus. If God has done the most for you, won't he

also do the least? If God has done the best, won't he do the rest? If God gave his Son to die for your sin, won't he not help you in your battle with sin? If God reconciled us when we were his enemies will he now cherish us as his friends?

What a blessing it is to live in a country where we can still freely talk to people about God's ultimate love for them in Jesus' his Son. So many people like Janis Joplin don't know how much God loves them and cares about them. We are privileged to let the world know of this ultimate love the Father has for us in Jesus his Son, our Savior. Amen.