

THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from
Region 6



Lectionary 11, Year A

Pastor Mitch Phillips, Northeastern Ohio Synod

Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership

Second Reading - Romans 5:1-8

Romans 5:1-8

¹ Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

SERMON TEXT:

Today's scripture passage from the fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans reminds me of some billboards I've seen - or commercials on TV.

The billboard may just be stark white letters on a black background - or maybe a very serious face pointing a finger at you. The commercial on television is some televangelist looking person leaning forward and looking right at you. The message is some version of:

"If you were to die tonight, would you be acceptable to God?"

What do you think?

If you were to die tonight, would you be acceptable to God?

If you answer "Yes" - you are wrong - no you're right

Eh - it's just a bad question

Let me ask: What did you start thinking about as you considered the answer to "If you were to die tonight, would you be acceptable to God?"

Did you start thinking about the things you have done in your life - to see if you might have done enough good to be acceptable to God?

If so - wrong answer - we can NEVER make ourselves acceptable to God - for we are part of a sinful humanity.

On the other hand, did you perhaps immediately reflect on the fact that you are a sinner and obviously can never be acceptable to God?

If so - again, wrong answer.

The problem with either of those is the direction one is looking for the required action of making one's self acceptable to God.

If we start with ourselves, we are in the wrong place

God is the one we must start with

God has already declared us acceptable. The cross of Christ was that emphatic declaration.

This is a MAJOR theme that Paul writes about this in his letter to the Romans. Here Paul is laying out the foundation of the core conviction of Lutheran theology that we are saved by grace through faith.

In the fourth chapter, Paul was talking about Abraham - and how his relationship with God had nothing to do with anything he had done - it was all based on faith.

Now, in the fifth chapter, Paul moves from writing about Abraham to talking about us:

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God [*meaning we are in a right relationship with God*] ... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand [*the access to this grace came through the cross - through Jesus' death and resurrection*]; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. . . .

And then a few verses later:

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time [*God knew that this was the right time to take this step*] ... at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person

someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

“Indeed, rarely will anyone die for someone else”

Have you ever stopped to consider what it would take for you to decide to die for someone else?

I’m not talking about accepting the risk of death, of acknowledging the possibility of death - like a firefighter or police officer - I’m talking about the absolutely sure and certain knowledge of your own death.

That is a theme that has been explored countless times in literature, theater, and movies - someone risking death for someone else - and usually everyone comes out okay.

Sometimes in the story, a character knows with certainty they will die - and they willingly do so for someone else.

And every now and then, the story puts the stakes higher - someone knowing their death will save thousands - perhaps even the entire planet.

Independence Day (1996): Russell Casse (Randy Quaid) - the crop duster pilot flew his plane into the alien City Destroyer ship when his rockets refused to launch.

Armageddon (1998): Harry Stamper (Bruce Willis) - stayed on the asteroid to detonate the nuclear bomb that would split it apart and prevent it from hitting earth.

Avengers: Endgame (2019): Tony Stark - a.k.a. Iron Man - (Robert Downey, Jr) - used the infinity stones and snapped his fingers to defeat Thanos and save the world though it would destroy him.

Honorable mention: Leonard Nimoy as Spock in "The Wrath of Khan" (1982) - allowed the Enterprise to escape the explosion of the Genesis device - but since that crew then ends up saving Earth in "The Voyage Home" (1986) I'm including it.

And I better not leave out Harry Potter willingly walking into the Forbidden Forest to allow Voldemort to kill him for he knew that would destroy the horcrux within him and make Voldemort vulnerable.

Yes, Spock and Harry end up surviving - but they did not know that. They made a choice - just like the other characters I mentioned - to sacrifice their own life to save the life - or lives - of someone they loved along with countless others.

God made a choice, too

God looked at humanity and made a choice. God looks at us and says:

"After humanity fell into sin, I gave them a system of sacrifices to help them to keep their eyes on me.

However, they kept their eyes on the sacrifices and obeying the letter of the law, and saw that as their way of creating a relationship with me.

They lost sight of the intent of the law as an example to show them how to live in relationship with each other and with me.

Therefore, I made the choice to offer one, final sacrifice - my own son - so that the bondage to sin may be broken for all time - so that they might be freed to live their lives focusing on a response to what I have already done for them - rather than trying to win my favor.

I did this even though they did nothing to deserve it - and while they were still wallowing around in their sin."

God says: "I did this simply because I love you."

What Jesus' death and resurrection means is the end of the power of sin and death

yes - we will all die - but through Jesus' resurrection, we have the promise of eternal life

this promise of eternal life is a GIFT through God's grace, which we grasp hold of through faith

And faith is simply complete trust in God's saving grace

We contribute nothing. Really, the only option open to us is to reject the gift

Having saved us from sin and death, God simply calls us to live a life in response to that gift - a life that follows the example of Jesus: loving and caring for our neighbors, addressing the hurts and hopes in their lives

To do less than this would be to turn our back on this radical gift bestowed upon us through the love and grace of God.

So let us not reject that gift - but rather take this reminder from the Apostle Paul to heart and fully trust that God has declared us to be acceptable and the saving death of Jesus was indeed intended for us.

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