

This Sunday's texts:

[Exodus 19:2-8](#)

[Romans 5:6-15](#)

[Matthew 9:35-10:20](#)

The Gospel

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The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9, verse 35 through chapter 10, verse 20:

³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." ¹Jesus called his twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. ⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons, Freely you have received; freely give. ⁹Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts - ¹⁰no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. ¹²As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. ¹⁶I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they arrest you, do not worry about

what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,²⁰ for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

This is the word of Our Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning. Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I have to admit I should have saved the whole astronomy bit for this week. This is fantastic. I love it! So excited for VBS this week.

Now there's an old joke about getting a seminary education that I believe, actually, I'm sure Pastor Jim has heard it, if not used it himself. It's a fake Freudian slip that folks will drop every once in a while and refer to “seminary” as “cemetery.” The joke is because seminary is where your passion for God goes to die. It's kind of grim, isn't it? While it may or may not be an exaggeration, the truth is that one of the risks of a theological education is that God, the Bible, Jesus, they become merely subjects to study. God can be some “thing” to learn about, rather than someone to know. I'll admit today's sermon is going to be a bit theological, maybe a bit dense. But my intent is not that it would be cold and academic, but rather that as we unpack important theological truths of the Gospel found in our scripture text today, we would realize the words of Philippians 1:9, “And this is my prayer: that your love may grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,” that as we grow in the knowledge of the God and His truth, we would also grow in our love for Him and others, that the truth of the Good News of Jesus would touch, transform, and inspire us to both greater knowledge and greater love and an awe for His love for us.

Now in today's text in Romans, we find the theological core of the Gospel. In just a few short verses, we find three statements containing the same important truth:

1. “At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”¹
2. “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”²
3. “While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son.”³

While we were sinners, powerless, enemies of God, Jesus laid down His life for us. The message is simple, beautiful, and powerful. Today, I want to dig in deeply

¹ Romans 5:6

² Romans 5:8

³ Romans 5:10

because this is a truth that this simple message is, in fact, an inexhaustible treasure for the church.

Now I often joke that I preach one-point sermons and that the point is always the same. **Jesus loves you so much that He gave His life for you, so that you can have new, abundant, and eternal life through Him.** That's basically it. It's what I do every week. It's the gospel. I do it because I believe with 100% confidence that if you've never heard it before, you need to hear it. And if you have, then the Good News of what Jesus Christ has done for you and me never gets old. So here it is another sermon with the same point.

You see, we live in a world broken by sin. I'm not actually sure anybody would seriously debate this, even outside of the Christian faith. Right? There might be an aversion to the word "sin," but I've not met a single person in my life who thinks that things are perfect the way they are. Sin is real. And yet the Christian assertion goes even further with its diagnosis. Not only are things terribly broken by sin, but we are also powerless to do anything about it. While this may be a little bit more controversial outside of the Christian faith, I think that just a moment's thought will prove that this is equally as true, because the history of humanity has been us trying by our own power to stop and undo the effects of sin.

Yet we can't legislate it out. In the United States, we have so many laws on the books that in 1982, there was a government task force that was set out with the job of counting the number of federal laws. Do you know what answer they returned with? This is the official answer from the government task force. Their answer was "too many to count." Surely, if legislation could make us perfect, we would be well on the way.

We can't educate ourselves out of it either, no matter how hard we try. Some would argue that the problem is that there's a lack of understanding, that ignorance and a lack of having the right information is the problem. Did you know that, in the 1930s and 40s, the most highly educated population that had ever existed in the history of the world was in Germany? That is Nazi Germany. Education is no guarantee.

We have the technological innovation. We've found incredible ways to do good. We've done things like cure polio. I can video chat with my nephews who live in Alaska because there are satellites up in space that circle around us. It's incredible. And yet as our technology advances, we've seen incredible good, but we've also advanced the ways in which we can kill, oppress, and indulge in our sin.

All of our greatest efforts to achieve heaven on earth have fallen so woefully short. Try as we might, we are powerless to overcome sin. And sin alienates us from the holy and perfect God. It mars His good creation and it breaks the relationships we have with one another.

And yet, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.⁴ Though we are guilty of sin and powerless to overcome it, and according to Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death,” when that sentence comes down, when it comes time for us to get our wages, to receive our check, when the sentence is passed down, Jesus stands in our place and says I will serve the sentence for you. Our record is wiped clean. Not only are we forgiven of it, but in God's eyes, there is no hint, there is no memory that an offense has ever taken place.

Jesus has taken the consequences of sin upon Himself, so that we can be declared innocent, declared righteous. In theological terms, we call this substitutionary atonement. Hold on to your horses. It's a doozy. Here's what it means and I've color-coordinated it so that you can see where the theological terminology comes from and how it makes sense:

Substitutionary Atonement: Jesus **substitutes himself for us**, taking the consequences of sin that we are due, so that we can be forgiven, so that we can be **justified before God**. That's what atonement means, that we can be set in right relationship with God.

Jesus substitutes himself for us, paying the penalty, so that we can be forgiven and made right with God. On the cross, our sentence was served, so that we can be declared not guilty. The word that the Bible uses to describe this state of those who have been made righteous, we find in our text today, “They are *justified*.”⁵

Now in honor of Father's Day, I'm going to tell you a dad joke. It's perfect. I learned it from Bishop Dan and so it is also a father-in-law joke. Here it goes:

What does it mean to be justified?

It's just as if I'd never sinned.

That's pretty rough, isn't it? But it's true and you will remember it because I did when I heard it in 7th grade confirmation. It'll stick.

The blood of Jesus pays the price for our sins and washes us clean, so that we are justified and because we have been justified, we are reconciled with God. While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through His Son.⁶ That text uses relationship language. While we're God's enemies: it means that in our

⁴ Romans 5:6

⁵ Romans 5:9

⁶ Romans 5:10

sin, we lived opposed to God and His will and plan for this world. And yet while we were His enemies, Christ willingly laid His life down for us. So the sin that alienates us from Him and others has been wiped away. You do not have to live with the burden and weight of guilt, thinking that God is a disappointed Father. Because our sins are forgiven, we stand righteous, pure, and holy in the eyes of God, through what Christ has done. Because we, in our sin, may have been enemies of God, but He was never our enemy. Jesus died for our sins. He gave His life to pay the price and made a way for us to have an unhindered relationship with God.

Now I want to end today with a story. Back in the mid-1980s, there was a rumor that began to spread of a Catholic woman in Mexico who was having visions of Jesus. The report got to the archbishop of her area, who decided that he needed to investigate. Maybe he thought, you know, “visions of Jesus? We can't have that!” So he goes and he speaks with the woman. “Is it true that you've been having visions of Jesus?” “Yes,” she replies. He says, “Okay, well, next time you see Jesus, I want you to ask Him to tell you what sins did I confess in my last confession.” He probably thought there's no way she can fake this one. About a week and a half later, she sends a message “Please come.” So the bishop arrives shortly after and says, “Did you do what I asked?” “Yes,” she says, “I asked Him to tell me the sins that you confessed in your last confession.” “And what did He say?” She took his hands in hers, looked into his eyes, and said, “Bishop, these were Jesus's exact words. ‘I can't remember.’”

You're justified and reconciled with God, through the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for you. It washes away your sins and makes you right with God. It's an invitation to His table, to receive again and again, in the bread and wine, the body which was broken and the blood which was shed for you. You can't deserve it. You can't earn it. And yet, He freely, willingly, and with no second thought gives Himself to you.

So let's revisit those texts one last time. And as we do, I would ask that you would let God's Word sink in deeply in your heart. Make it your prayer that the seed of His Word would bloom and sprout into faith, hope, and love in your life. “At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”⁷ “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁸ “While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled

⁷ Romans 5:6

⁸ Romans 5:8

to Him through the death of His Son.”⁹ That's the gospel. One point, and I promise you you'll hear it again because it never gets old.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are humbled and in awe of Your love for us and reminded each time we gaze at the cross of the incredible lengths that You would go to reconcile us to Yourself. While we were sinners, powerless enemies of Yours, Lord, You pursued us in Your love, and so we praise You and we worship You. In Jesus' name. Amen

⁹ Romans 5:10