

Peace With God

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on February 10, 2019

This morning we turn to the fourth sermon in our seven part sermon series on 2 Corinthians. And now, turning to today's reading, let us hear the Word of God as found in 2 Corinthians, chapter five, verses eleven through twenty one.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When I was in living in Brandon, MB, one of my neighbours, who was about my age, was on dialysis and in desperate need of a kidney transplant. Luckily for him, his father had a compatible blood type and was willing to donate a kidney in order to save his son.

In advance of the surgery, the father, wanting to give his son the healthiest kidney that he possibly could, lost seventy five pounds in six months - not an easy feat to do as anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows. Then, he willingly put himself through the risk of a serious three hour surgery. While the odds were pretty good that he would come out of it alive; it's surgery - you never know. Nor do you know how your body will respond afterwards or even if the transplant will be successful. It is all a risk. Not to mention a sacrifice. After all, my neighbour's dad was giving up a healthy body part. Yes, it was one he could live without, but, there is a reason God gave us two kidneys and not one. Add to that the nasty scars he would now have to showcase on his mid-section. And the six weeks of recovery time. And the lost income. It was a major

sacrifice. But, the sacrifice was made; without hesitation, all out of love.

In our Scripture reading this morning, the Apostle Paul explains to the Corinthian church why it is that he willingly subjects himself to great adversity in order to tell them about Jesus. As we have seen so far in this sermon series, and as we will see even clearer at the end of the series, Paul has endured severe hardship over a long span of time in order to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Of his own free will, he has surrendered an upper class life, with all its comforts and privileges, and of his own free will he has exposed himself endlessly to life threatening danger and suffering in order that he may tell everyone everywhere in the world about Jesus.

Now, why in the world would anyone in their right mind give up their life and endure great hardship in order to tell strangers a story? It doesn't seem like a normal thing to do; for Paul, or for anyone. And yet, in today's reading, Paul tells the Corinthians he is compelled to do it. He has to do it. Like my neighbour's dad in Brandon, Paul was compelled to sacrificial service by love.

In verse fourteen of today's reading, Paul tells the Corinthians that it is the love of Christ that urges him on. Notice that this statement has a double meaning. On the one hand it refers to Paul's love for Jesus. Simultaneously it also means Jesus' love for Paul. This, Paul tells us, is the what drives his ministry. Paul is motivated by love. But, not in the way we normally think about the word.

As we know, from the way the word "love" is used in popular entertainment and in everyday vocabulary, our modern understanding of "love" is very narcissistic. In the modern use of the word "love" there is no frame of reference beyond our own emotions. There is no virtue it possesses. Only a good feeling completely dependant on favourable circumstances.

In contrast to this worldly definition of "love," the Bible defines love as a state of being; not an emotion. As a result, Biblical love is a constant that is rooted in the character of God. So while we fall in love and out of love at the drop of a hat, and while we love something today and are bored with it tomorrow, Biblical love never changes. It is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. It does not go from hot to cold or to lukewarm. It is not dependant on circumstances or reciprocation. And it manifests its goodness simply because that is the nature of love.

Furthermore, Biblical love embodies all the virtue that exists within the essence of God. It is patient, it is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is righteous. It is holy. It is pure. It is just. In the Bible, and in today's reading, the most perfect example given to us that we might know the nature of Biblical love, is Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross.

In this sacrificial act, the compassion of God, the patience of God, the humility of God, the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, and the justice of God were fully demonstrated. In this sacrificial act, all the virtue that is embodied by the love of God, which is God's very essence, was on full display. In this sacrificial act of love, Christ made a pathway for us to find peace with God by fulfilling the five types of sacrifices that God instituted for His people Israel: reparation, purification, burnt, grain, and peace.

Given how important these sacrifices are for our understanding of how God's love works to make all things new, let us take a moment to refresh our memory from the sermon series from a year ago. Restating things as briefly as I can, in the reparation sacrifice all wrongs are made right. In the purification sacrifice what is dirty is cleansed and made pure. In the burnt sacrifice the chaos of sin is replaced by the perfect reign of God. In the grain sacrifice the love of self is replaced with the love of God. In the peace offering, alienation from God and neighbour is replaced with fellowship with God and neighbour .

This was the five fold pathway to God that was established in the Law of Moses for the people of Israel. And this pathway, the Bible tells us, was finally fulfilled, once and for all, when Christ died on the cross.

Again, the reason it matters for us that Christ died on the cross is that without Christ's sacrifice, the broken could not be made whole, the dirty could not be made clean, chaos could not be stopped, selfishness could not be uprooted, and alienation could not be alleviated.

Or to use the words that Paul used in today's Scripture reading, without Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the old order remains. Trespasses will be counted against us. Reconciliation with God is not possible. Righteousness is not attainable and we remain trapped by our sin.

But, the good news that Paul tells us is that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

This is what happened to Paul, who was named Saul in his former life. In the book of Acts we learn that before Paul met Jesus, he was the church's fiercest enemy. In the days when he went by the name, Saul, Paul, actively sought out Christians in order to silence them through violence. In the case of Stephen, he was the Jewish official who presided over his stoning.

While Saul was determined to destroy the church of Christ, his life was turned around when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. In that moment Paul's old life passed away and he became something new and unexpected. In that moment he ceased being the world's greatest persecutor of Jesus and instead he became the world's greatest champion for Christ. In that moment he ceased being an agent of destruction and he became an agent of reconciliation.

That being said, when Paul became a follower of Jesus he didn't go from being a ferocious lion to a soft cuddly teddy bear. As we have noted throughout this sermon series, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to affirm the gospel that he had preached to them and to warn the church that he was coming to them bearing the power and authority of an Apostle with the purpose of confronting the false teachers who were afflicting the church and to set God's house in order. Paul was still a lion.

And add to that, throughout Paul's ministry he demonstrated a boldness like no other. He was fearless. Make no mistake about it. Paul was still a lion in temperament. But, he was a lion that had been tamed by the love of Christ. He was a lion, who none the less had become a new creation. He was a lion who was entirely devoted to sharing the things that Christ had revealed to him with anyone who would listen.

Having encountered the living Christ, and having encountered the love of Christ, and knowing the full measure of Christ's love as demonstrated on the cross, Paul was compelled to follow in Christ's footsteps and offer himself as a living sacrifice by carrying on Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, by proclaiming the good news that he had received from Jesus himself, as he tirelessly traveled the world telling everyone about Jesus.

This is what Paul tells the Corinthian had happened in his life. And this is what Paul tells the Corinthians that he hopes will happen in their lives. And this is what Paul would wish for us as well.

That we would be transformed by the love of Christ. That we would be new creations who no longer live for ourselves but who instinctively offer ourselves in Christ's service because our love for him is so great. Having recognized the sacrificial love of Christ for us as perfectly demonstrated on the cross, Paul would hope that our lives would demonstrate the same sacrificial service as we carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus, proclaiming his death and resurrection far and wide. This would be Paul's hope for us. And as he hoped, may it be so.