

Sermon

September 16, 2007

Psalm 51:1-12, Luke 15:1-10, I Tim. 1:12-17

“Only Sinners Are Saved - If You've Got it All, You Haven't Got it At All”

God of Compassion in Mercy befriend us. Giver of Grace for our needs all availing. Last Sunday we talked abt about worship - Well - yes - to be honest - I talked, and I hoped and prayed that those who were here did in fact hear something helpful about why we worship and why we worship the way we do.

I mentioned the possible truth that we worship - that when we come here on a Sunday morning, we come because there is a longing, a kind of ache, a need and hunger in us - to be more connected than we are in all our busyness - connected with the power, the force, the spirit that is at the heart of everything that is or ever will be.

There is a godliness about us that draws us to worship, draws us together with others who share the same feeling, the same need to reconnect again and again with the source of our lives, with God our creator.

We come, as Augustine said, because our hearts are restless until they find a rest in God, the creator of all our hearts.

And we come, I think we come, I know I come, because I know a need in my life, to be better than I am, to find strength I do not find in myself,

I come in hopes of being the better self I know, I believe, I can be.

Yes - I worship. I seek to connect more strongly with God, a God of compassion and mercy who helps me accept who I am, and in Jesus Christ strengthens me to be more than I am.

I come - but how I come, how you come, with what spirit, what understanding we come with, makes all the difference in what happens here, and long after we have met to worship. We need to come in a right spirit...

Please pray with me.

Lord of life, and goodness and truth, of promise and hope, by your word to us this day, be light for our lives, and may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

With what spirit do we come? Somehow, somehow, I think we come, I think deep down, we come, because of that hunger and ache and need in us for God.

For more of God's goodness and grace and power in our lives.

Do we come, some of us, because it's a habit formed in us when our parents brought us, whether we wanted to come or not. Sure, do we come, some of us, for the sake of our spouses, or our kids? Yes.

But I think we come most of all for the same reasons that the tax collectors and sinners came to Jesus so long ago. And I think we come, because, like David, we want to hear a good word that can refresh us, renew right spirits with us, and help us find greater joy in the daily struggles of our lives.

And, as hard as it can be for us, I think we know, when we come, that we need to come because all is not quite right with us. We are not yet the people, the kind of persons, we'd like to be, and know we should be.

I think we do come because we know about ourselves what the apostle Paul knew about himself - and what he knew about Jesus Christ. That the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Long ago, King David, in doing the evil thing he knew he should not have done, David prayed to God - have mercy on me, and blot out my transgressions.

David knew what we know - that we need to be made right with God.

But David did not know what you and I know - that in Jesus Christ God has done what we can never do - God has made things right with God.

And - week after week - if we've got this worship thing right, if we've heard the good news of this Book, if we've made Jesus the focal point of our faith,

Then we discover over and over again, the life renewing power of God's mercy, forgiveness and amazing grace.

And if this does happen, if we do experience this kind of mercy, forgiveness and new life giving grace, then, then, we become agents of hope for our hurting world. We become ambassadors for Christ and for the power of his goodness and truth and love.

It is the story of one of the families caught up in the tragedy at Virginia Tech University this year. The McCain's daughter Lauren was killed in the tragic shooting. Her parents David and Julie have said - Christ gives us the grace to forgive our daughter's killer, because we have been forgiven.

God's grace carries us through life. We can do more than say our daughter was a great Christian. We can, like her, live fully for God. Because - we all need to know this precious life saving gift. And that is for me the wonder of the coming of Christ.

This is Roshashana - the Jewish New Year. And this special season will end for our Jewish neighbors with the festival of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. It is a time of confession, and renewal and rededication of faith. And we could learn from the dedication and devotion in some lives.

But - But - in Jesus Christ, the message of God's mercy and forgiveness and grace - was seen to be not only a message of promise and hope for a person's life, for a Jewish person's life - for my life -

In Jesus Christ the good news was seen, made powerfully clear, that it was a message to be shared with everyone everywhere. With good folk, good Jewish folk, good religious folk - and with everyone.

The message of God's grace was not even primarily for God's own good people. It was for All God's People. And - truth be known - that is still one of the hardest truths of our faith for us to remember.

The most important thing about our worship is not what happens when we come here, but what happens to us and then through us, out there, because we've been here. The Church of Jesus Christ, our gathering together as the Living Body of Christ, is not, as it often can seem most of all for us. The Church, and what we do here, is above all and most of all for the sake of those who are not here yet.

Jesus began teaching in the synagogues, as did the Apostle Paul, and then Jesus, and Paul, too, began to leave the synagogues when the people who met in them were too self righteous to know their need for God's grace, or to get the heart of Jesus' message.

That in his life and teaching God was proclaiming good news to the poor, release for captives, healing for the sick, and God's love and favor for all God's people. Paul gathered people, who heard the good news, who found joy in Jesus' message for them in the midst of life's struggles. Paul gathered them into the Church, the living body and presence of Jesus Christ in the world. And he taught the early Churches to be this living body.

To, yes, breathe in the goodness of God's grace - and then - breathe it out. To gather together to be strengthened, and to go out to spread the good news. To be as good and as loving and, as faithful as they could be to Jesus' way and truth and life...

But - to constantly seek to share the good news of God's love and forgiveness with those who had not heard it...

And the words of our Scripture lesson from Luke and from Timothy - are a challenge to us to remember why we are here. Not - just to hear the good news of God's grace - as much as we need to hear it - but hearing it - renewed by Grace again and again, here -

We are to remember that the Church exists most of all for those who are not yet part of the Church.

That we are to be the net that helps to draw more and more people into the grace-full Mercy-full, fellowship of Christ.

I was surprised, kind of pleased and kind of jealous, and envious, to open the Eccentric newspaper this weekend and find the very good publicity insert for our neighbors at Kirk in the Hills.

We've not the resources for that kind of witness, but, as a Church, we've got the same mission and message to share - and to share it more widely than we have done or are doing.

The word of Wesley is true - to do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can, as long as we ever can...

We exist, Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian, primarily not so we can keep on celebrating the good news of God's love for us, over and over again...

We exist so that the message of that love we've heard we can share.

It is a challenge we've not met as well as we could. We are bit too Presbyterian - and too little Community. When Presbyterians were asked when was the last time they had invited some one to attend their church, or to attend a church function with them, more than 90% said never. Never....

What kind of good news have we heard, that has been life saving and new life giving for us - and we haven't shared it? It can't be that it is so precious we can't risk sharing it - God's love is unending

We directly support missionaries to Mexico and Africa, and India and Russia - and maybe we forget that we are the missionaries for Christ right here - messengers of God's love in Christ for anyone who has not heard the good news and does not have a place in the church, the living body of Christ.

Are there not some things good enough about what we do as a Church, about our worship, our fellowship, our teaching, our Youth and music programs, our services and ministries of care and compassion, good things enough for you to invite others to discover and share in with you? Or - are there not names of people you can share with us, your staff?

Are there not people, still lost, not yet found, people like us, a little less than perfect, little sinful, or maybe more, longing, too, for what we hungered for and found in Christ?

And how will they know what we know unless we invite them to know it?

Yes - if we think we've got it all - we haven't got it at all.

Knowing what is ours in God's good grace is finally only good for us - truly good for us - if we share it. If we make known, in word and deed, the great good news of God's amazing grace in Jesus Christ -

Then - sharing this good news - I am the Church, you are Church, we are the Church - the living body of Christ - the Lord and Savior of us all.

Amen.

Faithfully, Rev. David Robertson