

Irresistible Grace – Perseverance of the Saints

Isaiah 51:12-16 John 6:35-40 Ephesians 2:1-10

In troubled and troubling times - when it seems there is hardly anyone or anything that we can trust, can count on, can rely on... When disease is a worry – swine flu and all And loses and declines in jobs and savings - and yes – moral values – leave us doubting and fearful

God's Word, John Calvin says, has these words of promise and comfort for us. Irresistible Grace – and - Perseverance of the Saints. Irresistible Grace - God's plans for us are good - Perseverance of the Saints - and nothing we can do, or anybody else can do to us, can change God's good plans for us.

The words we heard said it - *I have hidden you in the shadow of my hand – is God's word... All who believe in the son may have eternal lifefor by grace you have been saved through faith – the gift of God.*

We are here - John Calvin says God's Word says - we are here – in Church - hearing good news about God' love and care for us - and call to us - because that is God's will for us and for God's world.

And that is good news anytime – and very much so – in this troubled time. Thank you Jesus – and thank you, John Calvin. Let's us pray.

Lord of all life, by whose grace comes every breath we take, and every beat of our my heart, be present with us now – and may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be good news to us in Christ this day. Amen.

We pray it every week. And this week - we will celebrate in a very special way our faith in the truth or what see we will our faith in the truth of what we pray. We pray - Our Father, Who art in heaven - Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will be done – on earth as it is in heaven.

Always - but for us here at OLCC,P - in a special way - God has been good. And next Sunday we will take part in what I hope will be the unanimous election of a transitional co-pastor who will serve briefly with me – and then, upon my retirement, will be the next Pastor of OLCC,P.

We will take part in bringing about what we believe is God's Will for this Church. And in our faith, and our actions - we have been, we will be, living out one of the key beliefs of a man named John Calvin, and of the Presbyterian Church, which is strongly guided in its life and faith by Calvin's teaching about the Bible – and God's message to us in it.

At the heart of John Calvin's teaching about God's Word were, are – 5 key ideas – And the last two of them are part of my focus for us this morning. God's Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the saints - That is - that God is at work in our lives for our Good, and that finally, ultimately, God's will, will be done.

Born in 1509, 500 years ago, some people say that John Calvin was the most important figure in the Protestant Reformation, eclipsing Martin Luther. And - that he was primarily responsible for making possible the way you and I live in America - in a representative democracy that tries to deal with the dignity, but also the sinfulness, of every person. Our balanced branches and rights reserved for every level.

It began with Calvin's effort to free Christians from the grip of the Roman Catholic Church by driving home his message that the Word of God, the Bible, is the truth that governs our lives. John Calvin finally figured it out. Life, the best life, was not about himself, its not about yourself, it's about God. It's about God's way made known in Christ, and about how we can live in response to this gift in Christ for us.

Better than many other Christian thinkers, John Calvin helps us understand our faithless ness, and the power of faith to make us well.

Because of the way Calvin expressed his faith, because of the primary place he gave to the Word of God, and because of his view that lay persons, Elders, elected by the members of the Church, are called to lead the Church, and not priests or bishops or a Pope, Calvin has been called the first Presbyterian.

Now let's be clear – they are wrong. The first Presbyterian was a Scotsman. But John Knox was a close follower of Calvin's teaching.

Over these 4 weeks we've looked at 5 key points in Calvin's teaching and in our beliefs. Calvin found in God's word these 5 ways of understanding God's will for us and how we might respond to God's call in the way we live.

From serial killers, to three putt greens in golf, from our own sometimes selfish and sometimes sinful actions, and in the good and gracious things we do, Calvin helps us understand how God is at work in all of our life.

The 5 key points of Calvin's teaching - remember – can be remembered by the symbol of the tulip, each letter of that word the first letter of a belief Calvin taught.

- T Total depravity - we are all sinners and everything we do is affected by our sinfulness.
- U Unearned Unconditional Election - God works in our lives by the working of God's will, not by our deserving or earning God's favor. We are chosen as part of God's love and God's plan.

- L Limited Atonement - Christ died for all, God so loved the world that whoever believes - but - not everyone - only some – do come to faith, do follow the spirit's leading to become followers of Jesus Christ. And -
- I Irresistible Grace, and
- P Perseverance of the Saints = God's will be done and Once a Christian always a Christian, a sinner, but saved by grace through faith.

Tulip – 5 key points of faith that Calvin found at the heart of Jesus' teaching that speak truth to what he saw in the world. John Calvin was born in France in 1509 - and in this 500th birthday year, his tremendous contribution to our understanding of our faith, the power of God's Word to us, and the difference God's Word makes in our lives years has been studied anew.

Calvin studied first to be a priest, then to be a lawyer. And then his life was changed. In studying law. In studying law Calvin developed a deep appreciation for history and learned to take seriously the written word. It caused him to take very seriously the words of his faith, God's word. The Bible.

In that word Calvin found the truth that would guide his life and change the world. Biblical truth caused Calvin to challenge everything the Roman Church taught that was for Calvin, not supported in Scripture. It is what led him to promote lay leadership elected by Church members. Which is why it will be you who elect the co-Pastor – your next Pastor - and not a Bishop or a Cardinal or a Pope.

His faith in Scripture, the only place we know Jesus Christ - led Calvin to oppose the control of people's lives by the controlling use of the 7 Sacraments in the Roman Church. Calvin found only two that were Christ's command to his disciples – Baptism and Communion. And both, Calvin believed, were controlled, and offered, by the elected Elders and not by priests. You saw this again this morning.

Calvin put his trust in God and his confidence in the spirit working in the life of a church and its members, members of the Body of Christ - this he knew to be better than the decisions of one person - as priest of a local church, or Pope of the whole Church.

So - next Sunday – after all the hard work and all the prayers, we will take action - because of John Calvin....We will take action as a congregation, and, how we act, we trust, we believe, that our actions will be part of God's plan and God's will for us and for this place.

Even as we freely choose what to do - God is at work in us in a way that leads us to finally - do God's will. This is God's Irresistible Grace. Remember the words we read - *I have hidden you in the shadow of my hand – All who believe in the son may have eternal lifefor by grace you have been saved through faith – Our lives, our faith, the gift of God.*

You have felt it – haven't you? It's in part why you are here. You've felt it. In some moments, in some experiences of life, in some time of great sorrow, or I pray, it was some moment of

great joy, you felt it - that, yes, you were, you are, your life is – hidden in the shadow of God's hand. That underneath are the everlasting arms.

That there is a plan, that you are loved by God, and that – thru it all - in and thru it all - all the brokenness, the not yet fulfilled promise – of every day life - we are, you are, part of something great and wonderful and finally, finally, finally, Good.

That the light does shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. That's God's Irresistible grace. And that – sinners though you and I are – still – somehow, by the wonder of God's love for us, by the life giving, death defeating, eternal life giving power of God, by this truth, this good news, that you and I have heard about and seen at work in our lives, this truth - that nothing can separate us from the Love of God, which was and is - for us – in Christ Jesus.

This truth - is the perseverance of the saints, is a promise to us that helps us to live in hope, to know that we will walk through the valley of the shadow of death - into the comfort and protection of our God.

What a promise - What a gift --- Amazing – Irresistible Grace....Total Depravity - yes – sinners all. Unearned election – God loves us because God is love, not because we are so lovable. Limited Atonement – not all for whom Christ came, will believe, will come to follow him.

But in God's plan – by God's grace through faith - there are those who by God's grace, will be God's people - now - irresistible grace - and forever, perseverance of the saints. And the great hymn sings the truth for all who will truly hear it... It sings Tulip...

Amazing Grace – that saved a wretch like me - I was lost – but was found.. The Lord has promised Good to me.... His word by hope secures... He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures. When we've been there ten thousand years – we've still more years to sing God's praise.

Yes. Yes - I have hidden you in the shadow of my hand – All who believe in the son may have eternal life ...for by grace you have been saved through faith – the gift of God.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of your grace and for the gift of my faith in it and your promise for my life, now, and forever. *Amen.*

David W. Robertson Pastor