

God's Greater Story – A New Heritage

2nd Sun. after Pent. – 06/14/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Romans 5:6-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 15 **“For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”**

Introduction

✘ Today we enter into what is called the “non-festival” season of the Church year. If you remember the different colors that hang from the altar and around the neck of the pastor, this is the “green” season. Green is the liturgical color that symbolizes growth; more specifically our growth as Christians under the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent upon His Church on Pentecost.

➔ This year, during this long season after Pentecost, we are going to do something I have never done before in my 24 years as pastor. Because of the unique circumstances we face during the pandemic, at least for now we are still not able to meet in person for our Sunday morning Bible Study. And after already missing out on two months of time for us to grow in God's Word, it's important for us to find a way as Christians to continue our spiritual growth in Holy Scripture.

➔ Well, beginning today through the rest of the summer and into the beginning of fall our assigned Epistle Readings will be taking us on a journey through the Book of Romans. And so I have decided to follow and adapt upon the idea of Rev. Dr. David Schmidt, one of the professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and begin a sermon series here today that will serve also as a study of St. Paul's letter that he wrote to the Christian Church in Rome.

✘ This year our readings pick up in chapter five of Romans because Easter was a little bit later. But not to worry; I can set the stage of Paul's letter and theme to this point and get us caught up pretty quickly.

➔ The date is around 55 to 58 AD. Paul is in the upper Mediterranean region at Corinth. He is about to journey down to Jerusalem to bring an offering that he has collected from the churches there to help the Christians in the Holy Land who struggle with a famine there.

➔ But even as he anticipates his trip to Jerusalem, he has his heart set on his next missionary journey as soon as he drops off the offering. He's been longing to take a missionary trip to Spain. And along the way, he expects to stop by Rome, somewhere he has never yet visited.

✘ So he prepares and sends a letter ahead to the Christians in Rome to introduce himself as one of Christ's apostles and to give the Roman church an idea of what he believes.

➔ This letter that we know as the New Testament Book of Romans is Paul's statement of faith; his way of saying, “This is what I believe”.

✘ But as we listen to Paul's belief we hear a greater story than just the story of Paul's belief. He is not speaking of a belief that is only for himself. It is much more than just a personal theology or personal spiritual journey, as we hear so many people talk about today.

➔ Paul is sharing a far greater story; the story of God's work among His people; the story of God's saving work for all nations of all time. Paul's words of faith are the words of faith for all people. And so this study we begin today is a series of sermons that we are calling “God's Greater Story”.

→ It's a story that offers us deep theological growth and vision: a vision of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at work, to raise a people for His purpose in this world. In this vision we learn of God's claim upon your life and mine as He joins us by His work alone to be people intimately involved in His plan to renew creation; His plan to reclaim all nations back to Himself for eternity.

I. Weakness, Sin, and Enmity have Spread

- ⊗ Today's Epistle Reading begins with the cold hard facts of how far we human beings really fell when Adam and Eve turned away from God and followed their sinful desires instead. We really did hit rock bottom. We sank to the bottom of the barrel.
 - Paul says in verse six, "While we were weak...Christ died for us". What is it that makes us so weak? Or another way to ask that question is this: What is at the core of our weakness?
- ⊗ Paul puts forward a statement that many Christians have heard so often, they just accept it without ever realizing the deep mystery involved therein. He says that sin came into the world through just one man. Verse 12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned".
 - How can this be? Many people actually use this as their primary reason for rejecting the idea that God is a just God. They ask, "How can it be that the sinful act of one man, Adam, means that you and I and all people now sin; especially all of us who were not even born when Adam sinned (which is everyone, isn't it)?"
- ⊗ Ultimately it has to do with our heritage as human beings. Last week we saw in Genesis 1:28 that God created the first man and woman according to His image – the image of God's righteousness. Now, we were okay with our connection to Adam at that point, weren't we? It meant our very nature was righteous.
 - But now Paul shows us how deep our connection to Adam really goes. You see, Scripture wants us to see Adam, as the father of all mankind in that he shares his human nature with all of his descendants.
 - So as Adam sinned and turned aside from the good to which God called him, that meant that all human nature likewise became corrupt; despising the original image of God's righteousness; pursuing sin, and suffering the shame that comes with it. This lack of righteousness; this pursuit of sin; this experience of shame is the struggle of all humankind.
- ⊗ As David confessed in Psalm 51:5 that he was "brought forth in iniquity" and also in Psalm 58:3 that the "wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth", so you and I must confess the same still today.
 - Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:3 that we are all "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind". And Job 14:4 says that no one on earth "can bring a clean thing out of an unclean".
- ⊗ So it is as Scripture makes clear, that we all are steeped in our original sinful nature; a nature that reveals the weakness and corruption that comes with it from the day of our birth. Yes, the father of men, Adam, who turned to sin, could only beget descendants in accordance with his sinful nature. And each generation has been bound in sin to do the same.
- ⊗ This, of course, is why Jesus' birth from a virgin is so significant. In Jesus, Adam's nature is bypassed since Jesus is begotten of God the Father through the Holy Spirit and not of a man.
 - But still Jesus receives His human nature from His mother, Mary, so that He is 100% God and 100% man. Yet His human nature has no corruption of sin. This is important because it means, as Hebrews 2:17 and 4:15 tell us, that Jesus is tempted as we are, yet without sin; without enmity toward God and no corruption in His human nature.

- This is important because every sinner must then pay the consequence of death. Verse 12 tells us that death entered the world through sin and then spread to all men because all sin. This means we are all weak; we have no power to keep ourselves alive.
- ✘ We are sinners, on our way to death. Verse 10 shows that we are even “enemies of God”, choosing the path of sin rather than receiving and embracing with trust and love the good path God first set before Adam.
 - In this sin-generated weakness, it is impossible for us to be reconciled back together with God on our own power. As Job said, no one “can bring a clean thing out of an unclean”. Something that is dead cannot make itself alive again.

II. Christ Saves and Grants us a New Nature

- ✘ Yet Paul draws our attention now to a dramatic truth in God’s Greater Story. He says that the free gift of salvation is not like the trespass! When Adam sinned, he brought all of mankind into sin. But when Jesus died and rose on our behalf, He had no need to save Himself. Everything that He did, He did for us!
 - Sin seeks to imprison all people in eternal death. But the free gift of grace from God is the exact opposite of that. It releases all people into the joyous, reconciled life with God in which Jesus already abides and now brings us as well.
- ✘ How can Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplish something so profound and dramatic? How could any one man’s activity – no matter how righteous – make up for the unrighteousness of others?
 - Well, this is where the comparison with Adam helps us understand all of this. We know that Adam’s fall into sin led to his own corruption. And his place as the father of all humanity means that his corruption is then passed on to all of his descendants.
 - Now I know what many of you are thinking, “But Jesus has no descendants, so how can Jesus communicate His life and death to us?”
- ✘ As God, He does it in a spiritual and supernatural way. He uses His gift of Baptism. John 3:3 & 5 teaches us that in Baptism you are born again of water and of the Spirit. So in Baptism, you become a child of God. You are begotten of Your Father in heaven. He’s the One then that communicates to you His nature, that is, the gift of His Holy Spirit.
 - By God’s Spirit, your old nature is put to death in baptism and you and I are born again into a new nature; the pure, living, immortal nature of Jesus, the Son, by which we now have new life.
 - Everyone who believes and is baptized is begotten of God; receiving His nature; with the promise of life eternal. In this way, just as the children of Adam all sin, all die, and all are enemies; so the children of God have had sin put to death in them. They are now restored to life, and have been reconciled back to God.
- ✘ This is how Christ’s death shows us God’s great love for us. Although we were enemies; although we were sinners, going against God’s will, Christ still died for us. And baptism connects us directly to His death, meaning that we have now died with Him.
 - The old nature of sin; the old heritage of Adam died with Christ on the cross! Even more, in His resurrection, you and I are now raised to new life; to live in a new heritage. Now we are joined to the Holy Spirit to live each and every day in Christ’s gift of eternal life.

Conclusion

- ✘ As Paul says in verse 9, this means “we have now been justified” – judged righteous by the pouring out of Christ’s blood in our place. Our sin has been forgiven and put to death in us. We are saved from God’s wrath against sin, because in Christ our sin is gone.
 - ➔ So rejoice in God folks! Burst forth in songs of thanksgiving! Give praise to our Father, who has rescued us to have a new heritage; a new place in the Greater Story of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be all glory forever. Amen.