

Loved by God

Preached: 2/21/2021; 1st Sunday in Lent – Germantown;

This weekend is the first Sunday in the season of Lent. Maybe you are not familiar with the special seasons on the Church Calendar. Maybe you do not know about the season of Lent. Lent is a special season in the year. It was established very early in the history of the Church. It was established by Church leaders to be a season of preparation for when we will remember the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. It was intended to give Christians a time to think about why Jesus died on the cross, and to take steps to turn from sin. **2 Corinthians 5:21 – “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”** On the cross, Jesus took our sin upon Himself, experienced the wrath of God against our sin, and He gave us the gift of His perfect righteousness, so that now when God looks at us, He sees goodness instead of sin. The Cross of Jesus must never be far from our thoughts. As we are reminded of the cross, we ought to be moved. We ought to be moved to abandon sin and embrace the way of Jesus. As we reflect on what Jesus has done for us, some Questions for us to think about:

- Where is my life most unlike Jesus?
- What behavior, thoughts, feelings must I turn from?
- What acts, words, thoughts do I need to confess – that is tell God we recognize that as sin
- What will it look like for me to repent of that sin?

Last week, I presented a challenge to you as we go through this season of Lent. That you would take some steps to get yourself into the presence of Jesus. I realize that Jesus is always with us, we are never out of His presence. But we also must find our way to open ourselves up to Him, to allow Him to speak to us. In the story that we looked at last week, when the paralyzed man was brought into the presence of Jesus, He heard Jesus tell Him some very special words – “Your sins are forgiven;” and “Get up and Walk, you are now healed.” If you want to hear the voice of Jesus you must get close enough to listen. There are practices that you can engage in that will get you close to Jesus where you can hear Him – Prayer, Scripture Reading, Solitude. I have a friend – Pastor Dave Williams – who is doing a series of teachings on Youtube about Spiritual Practices. If you would like to check that out, you can find those videos on the Eastern Regional Conference Web site (www.ercog.org). Scroll down and find the link to Soul Stirrings. They are just short teachings that you will find helpful.

Candle: You will notice that I have a new candle burning behind me. If you remember, during the season of Advent we used the candles on the Advent wreath to announce the coming of Jesus. We have made this candle from what remained of the Advent Wreath Candles. I think it is important that we see the connection between the season of Advent and the season of Christmas. Jesus came into the world to save His people from their sins. And he would do that through his death on the cross. So the candle connects Christmas to Good Friday and then to Easter.

I want to encourage you to use this season for your spiritual growth. You will be a better person because of it.

Scripture

1 John 4:7-12 (ESV)

Message

Loved by God

Mother Teresa said that **“feeling unloved and unwanted is the greatest poverty.”** (Quote from Matt Clark). Christian writer, Matt Clark says that **“we are all fundamentally the same in that we all want to feel like we are loved and wanted. There isn’t a single person who wakes up in the morning and says, “I can’t wait to feel like I don’t matter today.”** People want to know that they have value and worth to others. When someone doesn’t feel loved they will do anything it seems to attract the love that they long for.

- They may use guilt or manipulation to get people to care about them (or at least appear to care)
- They will obsess about their appearance, perhaps always feeling like they are unattractive, that’s why no one loves them
- Some will become promiscuous – giving away sexual favors just to get people to like them.
- Some will self-medicate to cover up the pain – abusing drugs and alcohol

- Some may become so depressed because it appears to them that no one loves them, and they may choose to end their life

Living with the feeling that they are not loved, valued or appreciated can have devastating and painful consequences. Clark says, ***“It’s a terrible thing when you don’t feel loved in a marriage, a friendship, by God or with any other person or group of people in your life.”*** People who struggle with feelings like this should seek the help of a professional counselor. Sometimes a counselor can help a person understand that what they are perceiving may not be accurate. And a counselor or pastor may be able to help someone understand their value and worth as a human being in spite of what they may be experiencing from others. So if you struggle with feelings that you are not loved or that you have no value or worth, please reach out for help.

It may sound surprising to us to suggest that some people do not have a sense that they are loved by God. They look at their lives and see failure, brokenness, bad choices (sin). They have been the victim of bad choices by others – abandoned, tortured, abused. They conclude that not even God could love someone like them. But the good news of the Bible is that that conclusion is not true. In the passage that I read from 1 John 4, we are assured of God’s love. In verse 8, John tells us, ***God is Love.*** This verse does not define God as love. There is more to His character than that. But this verse assures us that love permeates God’s essence in all that He does. The New Dictionary of Theology points out that “God’s love is so distinctive that the Bible regularly uses a relatively uncommon Greek word to describe His love – Agape. God’s love is eternal, constant, and ultimately invincible by the power of hatred and evil.” God is Love. Now that is not just a “phrase” of empty words. The passage offers as evidence of God’s love for humanity His gift of Jesus. ***Vs. 9-10: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*** God Loves You!

I suppose that many people would nod their heads in agreement when they hear that phrase – God Loves You. They give affirmation that they believe that. The thing that concerns me however is that while many people say that “Know” that God loves them, they live and think and behave in a way that suggests to me that this Affirmation of God’s love is not real to them. They live as if they did not really believe that God loved them. That is an observation that I have made after being a pastor for 48 years. I’ve observed this among people who claim to be believers, or Christians. I think that when we don’t have a certainty, or an assurance about God’s love for us it stunts our spiritual growth. You may ask what evidence I see that leads me to this conclusion. There are several signs:

- Believers who do not live with the assurance that they are a beloved child of God. Addressing God as “Abba” is difficult.
- Believer who do not live with the assurance of their forgiveness. They fear that God might change His mind about their forgiveness
- Believers who do not live with a certainty of going to heaven. Heaven is still a “Hoped for” destination rather than a certainty
- Believers who have an inability to love others
- Believers for whom Obedience is a burden, rather than a joy
- Believers who do not know how to deal with suffering

All of these “issues” have their roots in the notion that believers do not really believe that God loves them. Over the next few weeks, I want to look more closely at these signs and see if we can overcome these negative ways of thinking. A title that I would give to this series is this: **When I Know that God Loves Me.....** How might your life be different, if you had a certainty that God Loves You?

Invitation: Maybe today for the first time the message has finally hit you that you are loved by God. Because God wants to be in a relationship with you, He sent Jesus into the world, for the purpose of being a sacrifice for sinners. The word in the text is “Propitiation”. That word refers to the work that Jesus did on the cross for each one of us. He took the wrath that we all deserve so that we can be forgiven. God’s anger against my sin has been satisfied, paid in full. If I put my trust in Him as my Savior, I can be forgiven and be reconciled to God. If you have never taken that step, I want to invite you right now to consider making Jesus your Savior. **Prayer of Acceptance.**