

Sermon: March 11, 2018

Carol-Ann Chapman

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.

All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

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Grace. It is a word we have heard...we say Grace before meals, my granddaughter's middle name is Grace. We may be offered the Grace of God in a blessing...but what does "Grace" mean? In the Christian church Grace is defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God desires us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. Grace is the absolute love, which freely offers forgiveness of the sins of humanity

Grace is a gift, freely given. No strings attached. I used to have a relative who gave me money at birthdays and Christmas, and although it was framed in the category of a gift...it was never really a gift. It was never really a gift because there were conditions around what I was given. Each time I would open the card, I would hear from this person. "Now I don't want you spending that on bills or the house or the kids. That money is for you, you need to spend it on yourself. Now I know that this person meant well. They wanted to make sure I had something special for myself. But when my children were young and we were struggling to pay the family bills, the greatest gift I could have been given would have been the freedom to use that money the way I wanted to. To know I had the funds to pay a hydro bill, or treat the family to dinner in a restaurant, or buy a new rug for the front entrance...that's what would have given me the most joy, but the instructions were clear...no bills, not for the kids or the house. So I was forced to use the money to buy a new sweater, or a pair of shoes, or something that was nice, but I could have done without...and there was always the expectation that I would show this relative what I got with the money. I don't want to sound

unappreciative...but if what I had received was truly a gift, it would have belonged to me upon receipt and I would have been able to do what I wanted with it.

Unlike the Birthday presents that I received from my relative, God's gift of Grace is free, no conditions and it is through this Grace that we have been saved.

Salvation...being saved, now those are other words we often hear about in the Christian church. Paul wrote a lot about being saved in his letters, and in the Message version of our reading from today this is what he says:

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving.

So if you are one of those people who has read the billboards that tell you, you must "believe in Jesus" in the way they believe in Jesus, based on the line of scripture in John that says. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* Know that your salvation, your eternal life is not dependent on what you believe or what you do. It is God's work, it is God's gift of Grace and nothing anyone prints on a billboard, or says or does can change that.

So if salvation is a free gift, and is not the result of good works, why shouldn't we just coast through life and enjoy ourselves?

Now “before we decide that the Christian life simply means relaxing by the swimming pool, sipping drinks with little umbrellas jutting out the top, Paul reminds us of the second part of the equation: “For we are what he has made us, created in Jesus Christ for good works.” So good works are now transformed. Instead of being frantic means for trying to save ourselves, good works are the blessed opportunity for us to live out the lives we were destined to live. Good works are expressions of Christ alive in us ministering to the world. Good works are demonstrations of our present reality and future; we are God’s royal children exercising God’s dominion of love in the world.”¹

Recently I sold my Father’s car. I contacted Fred, someone who had always said that he loved it and would be happy to buy it if I ever sold it. Selling it was difficult for me because my Dad always loved his car, and he had given it to me, but when the time came to get rid of it, it gave me some comfort to know that I would be handing it over to someone who loved it as much as he did. For me this was a gift. And because of this I didn’t ask much for the car and Fred felt that he had also received a gift. Just before I transferred over the ownership, Fred contacted me and asked me if it would be okay if he gave the car to his ex-wife. He knew that I had contacted him because of his love of the car, but his ex-wife had just finished Chemo treatments and had been struggling and he wanted to do something to help her out. I told him that the car now belonged to him and he could do whatever he wanted to with it. If he had decided to scrap it, that would have been his choice. I would have been disappointed, but once something is

¹ Dave L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, , Feasting on the Word Year B. Volume 2, (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville) P. 113.

given to someone it belongs to them, to do with as they wish. However, I thought what he had chosen to do with the car, was a beautiful gesture. And I was happy to know what I had given him, subsequently gave joy to another.

God creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing...(Ephesians 2:7-10) if we truly believe that God's gift of Grace has been given to us. If we believe, in God who sent us a Christ to bridge the gap between us and our Creator, in Jesus who gave us the commandment to love God and love others with all our heart mind and strength, we will want to use that gift for the betterment of God's creation and good works become something what we do because we offer our own gift of love in return. You are saved by Grace...period, but when you choose to use that gift of Grace to love others as God loves us, you are living life as we were created to live.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, today and always.

Amen.