

The Eighteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 18, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Lord God, you call us to work in your kingdom and leave no one standing idle. Help us to order our lives by your wisdom and to serve you in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Alleluia!
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-6

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¹ I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

Have you ever tried putting a puzzle together without looking at the picture? It is not so easy to do, is it? If I were take a brand new puzzle that you have never seen before, open the box, and shake all the pieces out on the floor, you would only see one giant mess. Yes, you could see individual pieces; you could probably pick out a part of a flower or a section of a house. Yet, other pieces are not so clear. You just see random colors and abstract shapes. You know that all these pieces belong together. You know a picture must be there, but you just cannot see it.

Can that describe life? Some parts you see clearly. You may gather the puzzle piece of a family. You gather a piece of job and a piece of home, of vacation, of joys. You can put together these things you know that you want. As you do that, do you ever wonder where you are heading, what you are striving for, what that final complete picture of life is supposed to look like?

It is as though our New Testament reading is holding up this crystal clear picture of what life is really all about. In verse four you hear: **God our Savior, [...] wants all [people] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** Those words are not mentioning the size of house you can buy or the number of cars you should own or how prestigious your job title should be. They do not point at things in this world and tell you to put your value (your self-worth) in them. Those words paint a far bigger, far grander, far more satisfying picture. **GOD WANTS ALL PEOPLE SAVED!** He wants everyone everywhere to enter heaven, to stand beside him in a place without tears and mourning, without heartache and tragedies ([Revelation 21:4](#)). He wants you to live in perfect peace!

This is not some half-willed intention or some noble promise that God will never keep. God's sincerest, most constant desire is that you are always connected to him! I mean, you see who is part of that "*all people*," right? "*All people*" includes you! God is not staying away from criminals, from bad parents, from disappointing spouses, and rebellious children. God does not seek only the finest people who help society. His heart beats for those who succeed and those who fail, for those who stumble and fall. He wants you to come and discover what Jesus has done! That is the rock-solid, certain truth he wants you to know.

Then God builds on that truth. Not only does he lay out his desire for you to live with him, but he also includes how you can be with him! Verse five says: **For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all [people].** Maybe you know those wonderful words. Jesus died on the cross for you! Children sing songs about that! You yourself may know the words to *Jesus Loves Me, This I Know*. Yet, tucked in those words is a truth that may leave us shuddering. We need a mediator in order to reach God. We need a ransom paid in order for God to love us.

As clear as that truth is, we are tempted to take those words as something uncertain. I mean, God clearly calls Jesus our "*Savior*" and our "*ransom paid for sin.*" Yet, when guilt burns your conscience, where do you turn? When tragedy strikes your heart, where do you find comfort? When the nightly news reports increasing violence, where do you find answers? When you sit on the edge of your bed at night, wondering if life is only this monotonous grind of eating, sleeping, and working, where do you find direction?

We want to look at ourselves, right? That happens for two reasons. The first is because God has etched his commandments into hearts of all people—ours included. The Bible reveals what that command is: *Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul. Love your neighbor as yourself* ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). It means you must never hate another person. You must never have intimate feelings about someone you are not married to. You are never to steal or want to steal. You are not to find more meaning in your stuff than you do God. Break that command and guilt burns your mind. After all, if you experience guilt, it means that you are accountable to someone for the actions you committed.

When guilt burns our minds, we turn to ourselves because our heart believes it can make the situation right. You might scour the very recesses of your heart, hoping to discover some inkling notion of how to make things better. You may try to drown out the bad by doing more good. Perhaps you make promises to live a better life than those around you. You might make New Year's resolutions to end bad habits and begin good actions. We construct these plans to improve life. You may even take it upon yourself to do all you can to earn God's happiness.

Yet, the truth is, we need someone to make us acceptable in God's sight. We need someone to pull back the curtain of what life is all about. Because on our own, with a life apart from God, it is like putting together a puzzle without ever looking at the picture on the box. We can rely on ourselves to make life better, but we will never be sure when it is

good enough. If you rely on yourself, you will never be certain of how you stand before God.

That is why God steps in and clearly reveals what he has done for you. He wants you to **come to a knowledge of the truth**. The cold, hard truth is that your failures, shame, and guilt have separated you from God ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). Instead of eternal life in heaven, your wrongs earn you death— death on earth and death in hell! Your own feelings and actions can never bring you closer to God. So God sends his one and only Son to be your mediator.

You want proof? Then look at the Christmas manger. Jesus Christ is lying there, a baby with flesh and bones— a human being like you and me. He eats, sleeps, cries and laughs— just like you and I do. Like us, he is expected to obey God's high demands ([Galatians 4:4-5](#)). He must never steal, never want to steal, never hate, never lust. He is like you and me— but he is perfect. He never hurts anyone. He never searches for meaning in life. He knows his life revolves around God. God looks at Jesus and delights in him.

Yet, Jesus' love for you runs deeper. He lifts your shame and guilt off from you and he puts it on his back. He walks the painful road to the cross where he is crucified. As he dies on the cross, Jesus is suffering your penalty for sin.

If Jesus pays the penalty for sin, then what is left for you to pay? Put another way, if Jesus pays off your monthly credit card bill of one million dollars—if he pays that debt— then what do you owe the credit card company? Nothing! If Jesus pays the penalty you owe for disobedience, then what does God want you to pay? Nothing! That is why we celebrate Easter! That is the day Jesus rises from the dead. That is important, because if Jesus rises from the dead, it means he does not have to suffer death as punishment for wrongdoing. Jesus has removed your punishment! If Jesus removed your sin off from you, then what does God see on you? No sin! That means you will not die forever; you do not have to pay that penalty. Rather, you enjoy this free gift of life!

God clearly says this is what he did for you. He holds up this splendid picture of where you are going in life! More than that, he constantly reminds you of it. I mean, do you see who Jesus dies for? Not just for a select few. Not for only good parents and upstanding citizens. He died for me, for you, for your wife and children. He laid down his life as a ransom— and God accepted that payment.

Do you see why you need Jesus? Because only Jesus makes you ready for heaven! He gives you certainty for your life to come. He does not point you to the future and say: "Well, see you there!" He points to the here and now and reveals the certain guidance you have in life.

Why do you need Jesus? Or, how does Jesus make you grow? Well, the truth is, life is not perfect. Maybe you are wrestling with guilt. Maybe past shame makes you feel so unworthy to be loved by anyone. Maybe you have hurt your family so deeply that you feel rotten to the core. Perhaps you broke a promise you wanted to keep. That guilt will tug at you to rely on yourself. If you rely on yourself, you will still feel uncertain; you will never know how to get rid of that guilt once and for all.

So, Jesus remains with you now. Look once more at verse five. **For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.** Jesus was not your mediator for a one-time use. The verb “is” describes an action that continues. Jesus continues being your mediator, the one who takes your needs and worries to God.

It means that when you feel guilty, when you know you have done wrong, look to the cross. Jesus died for you. That is a fact. You may feel unworthy to be forgiven, but Jesus still died for you. You may think you have to repay God, but Jesus never asks for repayment. He leads broken and contrite people to his cross and says: *“See? I have forgiven you! It is finished!”*

It means that Jesus remains the mediator between you and God. So, if you have worries or fears, pray. Just like talking to someone on a telephone, bring your every request to God. He hears you because Jesus is carrying your pleas to him.

It means that when tragedy rocks your world, look to God. The temptation will be to look at yourself and try to unearth reasons to be happy. Yet, look to God. He swears to you that heaven is your home because of what Jesus has done. If he remains in your life as your mediator, then it means that he will remain in your life as you face challenges.

That is the rock-solid certainty God gives you. Without him, life might be like a puzzle you are putting together. You gather a piece of job, a piece of home, of vacation, of joys. Yet, you may never know what that final complete picture is supposed to look like.

That is why God gives you Jesus. So that you do know what the picture looks like. So that you know Jesus died for you. So that you know forgiveness is yours free of charge! So that your heart may hear and trust this Word.

Even in life’s dark days, the things he does for you will not change. How do you know? Because God tells you in his unbreakable Word. He loves you every single day. He binds it together in promise: **GOD WANTS ALL PEOPLE SAVED!**