

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

July 10, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Romans 5:6-11

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (NIV)

Even if you did not follow the coverage very closely, many of you have probably seen or at least heard about the verdict in the Casey Anthony case. The pictures of her crying tears of joy, of her smiling, and of her laughing have been all over the place. The reason for her tears, her smile, her laughing, is because a jury of her peers found her to be not guilty. She will be a free woman again. Since this not guilty verdict came in there has been much reaction. We are not here to debate the case today, but I just want to point out that I have not heard a whole lot of joy, of sympathy, of compassion, of love for this woman who will go free. Instead, even from myself because I think of what happened to that little girl, there are more feelings of doubt and resentment and skepticism. There may even be a bit of anger and people questioning if true justice was done.

Dear friends, this morning I looked in the mirror at a person, and I am looking at a room full of people now, who deserve even worse than life in prison or the death penalty. Yet, all of us here are people set free - people who have been declared not guilty. I can say with certainty not a single one of us deserved to be acquitted. But by grace we are! We aren't free because a jury of our peers did not see enough evidence, but because we have a God who has all the evidence He needs to convict us, but instead He chose to love us. He chose to save us. He chose to pay our penalty and free us. So I pray we rejoice, we smile, we laugh, and even cry if we want, because of the love of our God for sinners like us. Today, I pray our eyes are open to see: **The perfect proof of God's love is Christ died for us!**

Paul's description of us is one that is a bit difficult to swallow. Paul describes us as powerless and ungodly. I do not know about you, but I don't find that very flattering? Who wants to be called weak and helpless? Who wants to be known as being an evil and bad person? But Paul speaks the truth. We were powerless, helpless, and without any strength of our own to save ourselves. We were also ungodly from the word go because each of us was born steeped in sin from birth. Our lustful, envious, and greedy thoughts, our words of gossip and anger, and our selfish and disobedient actions all too often reveal the evil has been in our hearts from the start.

Imagine how helpless you must feel sitting on trial for your life. You may have a high paid lawyer speaking for you, but you are really powerless. Your life is in the hands

of a jury. Even worse, imagine sitting in court knowing full well that you are guilty and, whatever penalty they want to throw at you, you have it coming. That's how we stood before God, how all sinners stand before God. We are powerless and ungodly. We are guilty. That's why these words are so sweet to our ears. ***"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."*** Jesus came right at the time God had planned, right when we needed Him the most, and He died for us. It was all one sided. He loved us. We did nothing, we could do nothing, we would have done nothing to change our status with God, but Jesus did. He died for us and that is the perfect proof of God's love.

Near our Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin there is a police station I drove by each day on my way to class. Out in front of it there is a statue of an officer embracing a little girl. There is a story behind it. One day a dangerous armed robber was about to get caught and he grabbed a little girl and held her hostage. The police officer begged for the man to take him instead and let the little girl go. After all, she was an innocent little girl who had done nothing wrong. The armed robber agreed and made the switch. But then as a sniper finally took aim and made a shot, that police officer was killed. He became that girl's substitute and ended up giving up his life to save hers. That is what Paul mean's from this example: ***"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die."*** For a little child, for a good cause, for someone people love or try to protect, at times, a person will give up their own life to save another, but even that is rare.

Now comes the big punch line: ***"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** Do you see what makes God's love so amazing, so indescribable, so sacrificial, so perfect? Not only did Jesus do a very rare thing by giving up His life for someone else, not only did Jesus die in the place of another, but Jesus did this for us - the righteous for the unrighteous? He did this for sinners - the worst of sinners. He did this for us even before we cared a thing about or wanted anything to do with Him. He died for people that even hated Him and were His enemies. Jesus became the substitute for sinners. And the Son of God took much more than a bullet. He stepped under the wrath, the consuming fire, of a holy God. On the cross Jesus received the verdict every sinner should hear - guilty, and received the punishment every sin has earned - hell. Jesus suffered the pain and torture we and our sins deserve. Then, on the cross, our Savior died. The perfect proof of God's love is Christ died for us!

This means you and I are free. We walk away unpunished. We are acquitted. The not guilty verdict has come down from God's throne. All our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus - forever. All our sin and all our guilt has been buried with Jesus. This is God's verdict and God's verdict can't be changed. He has declared the world not guilty because He reconciled the world to Himself in Christ. All who believe in Jesus go free.

We know this to be true because it is true. And yet we still sin. We look at the actions of ourselves and others and at times remain a little skeptical. We each still have a conscience that reminds us what we really deserve from God, and it's not good things. The devil still tosses darts of accusations in our direction. We carry around needless guilt on our shoulders. Even for us who believe and place our faith in Jesus, we have moments

when wonder what our death and what the day of Judgment will be like. Fear and doubt sometimes rear their ugly heads. Paul knows this all too well.

So listen closely as Paul offers us these tremendous words of comfort. ***“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”*** Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit puts it this way: *“If God sent His own Son to bleed and die for us when we were ungodly sinners, when we were His enemies, how much more is God going to love and care for us now that we are righteous in Christ, now that we are His children!”* If Jesus was willing to go through the misery of Good Friday to bring enemies like us back to God, if by His death we are declared not guilty, how much more shall we, His disciples, be saved by His empty grave and His life and enjoy His victory! As Paul starts out this chapter: ***“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** We don't have to fear death. We don't have to fear judgment. There is no need to doubt. God loves you. I've heard it said that Christ died is history, that Christ died for us is Christianity, but that Christ died for me - that's salvation.

Dear friends, Jesus died for you. He died for sinners. Now there is only one thing left for us to do. ***“Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*** It is time to smile. It is time to laugh. It is time to cry. It is time to worship and praise. It is time to tell others the good news. It is time for us to live for God and live in a way that reflects His great love for us because are free from sin and free to live for God! It is time to rejoice because we who were once far off have been brought near, we who were once headed for hell are on the way to heaven. We have the perfect proof of God's love. We can debate all we want if Casey Anthony should be walking away after being found not guilty in the death of her daughter. But there is no debating that you and I deserved far worse, but because we have a God who loves us get far better. We get more than freedom - we get life eternal because Christ died for us! Amen.