

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY!



Scriptures:

Psalm 51:1-12

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

John 12:20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY

A few weeks ago I preached about the passage in Mark 8 where Jesus says, "For those who want to

save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." This passage in John takes that message a bit farther. After Andrew and Philip come to Jesus

he says, “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” What does this mean for us today?

You may lose your life if you love it too much?

THE DISCIPLES

Soon after Jesus is arrested we see this passage in action. Peter, one of Christ’s most faithful disciples, tries to save his own life when threatened with arrest. He denies he even knows Jesus, not once, but he denies him three times in an effort to save his skin.

The other disciples also run off and hide when Christ is arrested. The only disciples who stay by him are the two Marys (Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary) and John. The rest are nowhere to be found during his crucifixion. And while they are in hiding their lives of faith are slipping away.

Does that mean God abandoned them when they abandoned God on the cross? Absolutely not! The frightened disciples gained the courage to rise up after Christ arose. Then they worked very hard to get the early Christian church going. In fact, Peter lived up to Christ’s plan for him to be the rock of the church’s foundation despite his faithless failings. Did you see the KQED special about walking in Peter’s footsteps last week? Very well done! It reported he spent time in what is now Turkey!

GOD’S FORGIVENESS

God forgave the disciples for trying to save their own skin when Jesus was arrested. Yet the even greater message in this passage is a warning to not cling too hard to a self-centered life in this world, but to follow the path God lays out for us and risk our lives to do ministry and mission work, to save the lives of others, to advocate justice for those who are being mistreated, and to do all we can to build up the kingdom of God now, on earth as it is in heaven. That is what losing your life for Christ means. You will gain life if you lose your life in a life of Christ, living as he lived on behalf of God.

There are some people who cling to their comfortable lives so tightly they never do anything out of their routine of self-fulfillment. Do you know anyone like that? Sometimes it is based on fear.

ETERNAL LIFE IS NOW

Eternal life is now. So when you have to lose your life to save your life, it means your life will be

better now if you act as Christ did on earth. Following Christ’s way and truth and life means being a forgiving, loving, caring, self-sacrificing, generous, wise, friendly, positive, open, non-prejudicial, hospitable, and most of all prayerful person. That opens up the joy in eternal life now when you behave this way. When you act the opposite way, your life is a living hell.

We all know the verse John 3:16: 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. Right after that verse, in John 3:17, we find it says God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. My Presbyterian pastor friend who married a Jewish woman interprets these passages to mean that once we get to the part of eternal life that begins after our death, we will all clearly recognize Jesus as God in his Second Coming. Then we will be welcomed into God’s loving arms all together. No one will be condemned.

The people who interpret these passages in our present day church to mean we must be exclusive and not inclusive are putting God in a box and sealing it closed. It is arrogant to think we can understand all the mysteries and power of God and can draw boundaries between people and God.

Only God fully understands the mystery of eternal life. We now see as if in a mirror dimly but then in heaven, when we will finally experience the afterlife, then we might know and understand more clearly. Hopefully, or else we will be so joyful we won’t care if we understand it or not.

OUR PURPOSE

There are so many passages in the Bible that show our purpose is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and let the Holy Spirit do the evangelizing and converting others to faith. Our job is not to judge. “Judge Not!” And “Jesus Wept” are two of the shortest verses in the Bible. Not judging and weeping with those who weep are excellent

ways to demonstrate in action what it means to be true Christians.

The Good news is not that God so loves only those who grew up in a Christian family and were taught how to have a relationship with Jesus. The Good News is that God so loved the WORLD!

ST. PETER'S TOUR OF HEAVEN

Did you hear about the man who dies and goes to heaven? St. Peter gives him a tour to show him the various groups of people. "Over there," says St. Pete, "are the Episcopalians. Over there are the Lutherans. Over there are the Jews, and there are the Muslims. Over there are the Hindus."

Finally, before they get to the next group, St. Peter says, "Shush, be quiet." The man asks why??? St. Pete replies, "Those are the Southern Baptists. They think they're the only ones here!"

God must laugh when we fallible creatures act as if we have God all figured out and know exactly who is in and who is out of heaven. We don't even know exactly what heaven is. And there are many reasons to believe that hell can be better described as having a feeling of being separated from the love of God rather than a place where we burn in eternal damnation. Description of Gehenna (the Greek word for Hell): a place outside of Jerusalem where trash was burned. It is a place where people were sent as a punishment for crimes and exiled there away from the city when the prisons were full. Being sent to Gehenna became, "being sent to Hell."

It is not something to fear. For our God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love. You are already saved through God's amazing grace. Jesus shows us the way to live well.

MARCUS BORG

The late Marcus Borg once said, "Christianity, these days, is a fear-based religion. And it relates to a lot of American politics that is fear-based politics." He added, "I would wager that half of our population, or maybe more, lives in bondage to fear: financial fear, fear of terrorism, fear of the rest of the world, so many fears. Jesus taught that salvation means being liberated from fear. We don't help anyone by pushing forms of Christianity that brandish the fear of hell over people's heads."

Borg believed that: "Salvation as liberation from bondage comes straight out of the story of the Exodus. The second event that most shaped the Jewish bible was the experience of exile in Babylon. That story of exile creates an understanding of salvation as a return, a reconnection and a homecoming. Also scattered throughout the Bible, you have images of salvation as having one's eyes opened. Jesus talks about this. (Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear...) There are other forms of salvation, too. In Psalms, salvation is primarily about deliverance from our enemies or deliverance from serious illness or from other threats. Salvation has rich meaning such as: liberation from bondage, homecoming, eternal life rather than death, sight to the blind, healing from the wounds of existence, being rescued from misery and more."

ALL PEOPLE

John's passage today shows us that Jesus promises to draw all people to himself. All people, not just a few, not just those who say they believe in him. Jesus comes to save us from ourselves. The ego centric self that wants to be selfish and lose our lives in shallow living.

As a psychiatric nurse I have worked with a lot of people whose brains have difficulty grasping a sense of faith. Do you think all those people are condemned to hell because they don't have the ability to understand what it means that Jesus saves? Or what about the people who are born into families and regions where the predominant religion is Hindu, or Muslim, and they die before they even hear about Christ. Do they get condemned for not having the opportunity to believe?

There are bright rational people like my roommate in college who couldn't feel comfortable walking into a church for a long time. Her father was a pillar in their large local church. Her Dad had fame and fortune and the church honored him for his involvement and contributions. Yet when the family went home from church on Sunday mornings he would continue to severely abuse his nine children. As a result almost all of those nine children feel anger just thinking about walking into a church. Only my friend, who is now a Neuro ICU nurse, is involved in a church now. But it took her about thirty years to decide that not all churches look the other way when there are obvious signs of

child abuse happening. Her refusal to attend church before wasn't about a lack of faith in Jesus, it was about finding a church she felt comfortable in, one that did not ignore or enable abuse.

GOD IS LOVE

The reassurance we have from the Bible tells us in Proverbs 3:5 to trust in the Lord with our whole hearts and to not lean on our own understanding. Rather than requiring people to believe in a certain way or to say a certain prayer to be saved, 1 John 4:8 says, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*"

Yet there are people who are unable to show love because they have grown up without love. We learn love from our parents and caretakers. That is why I love to tell the story of Jesus. Not because I think it is the only way to receive eternal life, but because it is the story I know best and love, thanks to my Mom.

In our little church in Iowa I helped my mother teach the three year old Sunday School class their first Christian song, "Jesus Loves Me." (I also loved telling stories with the felt figures on the felt board.) And I learned to love Jesus because the stories taught me that he is the most forgiving, loving role model that ever lived. But it was my mother's love that showed me what God's love feels like. Many people these days don't really know who Jesus is because they weren't taught the stories in Sunday school as a child. So it is important for us to tell the stories today to adults, too.

CHRISTIANITY IS UNIQUE

Jesus is unique among all the founders of the world's religions because he is the only Divine figure who sacrificed himself out of his deep, deep love for all of humankind. The other faiths have very common beliefs about peace-making, loving God and caring for others, and the existence of some form of afterlife. But Christianity is unique in having a Divine-infused human who showed us how to love our neighbor and how to pray, to forgive and to heal those in need no matter their status in society. No other belief system has a sacrificial self-giving savior who is the Son of God, and Prince of Peace, as Jesus Christ is. Our faith is unique in having a Savior whose miracles and

relational stories of healing and redeeming show us how deep God's love is for all.

This next hymn tells *the old, old story of Jesus and His love*. The story behind the poetry for this hymn is very inspiring! Arabella Katherine (Kate) Hankey was born in London. Early in her life, she developed a fervent faith and started a Bible class for the girls in her neighborhood. In her thirties, Kate became seriously ill and it was during the lengthy period of recovery that she wrote *The Old, Old Story*, a long poem about Jesus. The complete poem was first published in 1867. From this poem came the hymn *I Love To Tell the Story*. Our daily devotion booklet today talks about the songs that help us feel closer to God. This is one.

Benediction:

Lose your life of fear and live a life of love.

Let us proudly tell the story of Jesus and his love to all who need reassurance of God's love and care.

In remembrance of St. Patrick, receive this blessing by John O'Donohue from the book "*To Bless the Space Between Us.*"

**I pray that you will have the blessing
Of being consoled and sure about your death.**

**May you know in your soul
There is no need to be afraid.**

**When your time comes, may you have
Every blessing and strength you need.**

**May there be a beautiful welcome for you
In the home you are going to.**

**You are not going somewhere strange,
Merely back to the home you have never left.**

**May you live with compassion
And transfigure everything
Negative within and about you.**

**When you come to die,
May it be after a long life.**

**May you be tranquil
Among those who care for you.**

**May your going be sheltered
and your welcome assured.**

**May your soul smile
In the embrace**

Of your Lord and Savior.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
March 22, 2015**