

Sermon Text for October 4, 2015

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Romans 5:18-21 Genesis 18:22-3

“One more chance”

Today is World Communion Sunday and it is a day that we recognize that Christians all over the world are celebrating the very real presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as reflected in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is a time when we are able to expand our awareness that this church is not by itself but rather represents a family that extends beyond Strasburg, beyond Lancaster county, beyond even the United States. In light of that we will be talking about the father of the three main monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. That father would be Abraham. Abraham in this Scripture plays the role of protector by trying to protect his nephew Lot, who over time had become more like a son to him. He tries to save his life by bargaining, arguing with God to save the city in which Lot lived.

As we overhear the bargaining, the question comes to us: can a few righteous people save a village or even a city, or how about a race or a culture, or even a nation of unrighteous people? Or can a father save a family or a mother her children. We hear about another showing the bravery of one man who tried to save others. This bravery where he puts his life in danger in order to save others. Abraham takes a different approach to saving the city of Sodom, and that is through reason, bargaining. Then we have the Romans Scripture is probably the clearest in all of Scripture explaining the need of salvation for all of humanity and the certainty of salvation found in Jesus Christ. And we find that through Christ we, an unrighteous yet loved people, are given one more chance, even though no one, not one is righteous. All of this because of a hero that gave his life for us. He gave us another chance.

It is difficult to understand this Scripture if you've never haggled in a market place before. I really don't like haggling at a market at all. I remember when we were in Israel and in Italy Rachel wanted a scarf and a dress and she asked me to haggle, I tried, but failed miserably, and then she stepped in like a pro and got the items for half the price I every could have. I think you either have the haggle DNA or you don't. I guess the only time I've ever haggled and brought down the price were the bribes the policemen forced you to pay when they stopped you in Russia. I was really good at that.

Here Abraham is involved in a classic dealing or bartering with God. There is no other way to look at it. Abraham knows that God is bound to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah but his nephew Lot lives there so he finds himself in a position of having to do something about it. After God makes his statement in the previous chapter that “I must go down and see if the outcry against them is true.” Abraham asks God: now when you go down there and things are really that bad, I mean, they can’t really be all bad can they? I am sure that it is just a couple of bad apples that is giving a bad name to that town.

Come on, let’s say that there are 50 good people over there, come on, that’s a good number, you would spare the town wouldn’t you? And now the dealing begins. He makes the offer explaining what a good offer it is and even builds God up by saying that you are righteous, you aren’t a random God and you can do whatever you want. So I am sure that you want to do this. He begins low, probably an unrealistic number because he thinks that God is going to require much more than just a small fraction of the people represented in that town. Abraham knows that God is going to ask for more but that is his first offer. He makes the offer and waits expecting God to make a counter offer. But God doesn’t.

God says okay, if there are 50 people then I will save the town. There is nothing worse than someone who is ready to deal and the other person wants nothing to do with it. There was probably a small part of Abraham that was disappointed, but only a small part. That was an easy offer. It was almost too easy, what was the catch.

Sometimes in our life we are used to defeat, or at least conflict and struggle that when it doesn’t come, in the back of our minds we think, okay, what’s the catch.

What Romans tells us is that there is no catch. Jesus Christ came with no strings attached through an act of amazing and undeserved grace. Sometimes that’s hard to accept because we don’t deserve it. Isn’t that the point? God gives us one more chance in Jesus Christ and we don’t deserve it. When you ask for God’s guidance and you seek God’s direction and you overhear God’s voice, sometimes you think it’s too good to be true.

Now Abraham gets a little confident and he wants to go a step further and asks, what if, I mean just by chance, I am sure that it won’t happen, but what if 5, just a measly 5 aren’t quite as righteous as they should be, will you still save the town? Okay, for 45 I will save the town. I know I shouldn’t ask and push my luck but what if 5 more just kind of back slid? I will save the town for 40. All of a sudden 10 more are gone, what about

or 30, yes, another 10, yes what if another 10 left the fold. I will save the town for 10 people.

When you are bartering you can tell when you have reached your limit. And you know that if you push it too far you will cross the line and insult the person with whom you are bartering and they will get angry, pack up their things and storm off and you will be left without that item for which you were bartering. Abraham probably felt that he had reached that limit. He didn't want God to get disgruntled and leave and just destroy the town because Abraham had pushed to far. After all, there probably were 10 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Who knows how far God would have gone? One, or maybe even none. But Abraham leaves the barter at 10 and the story ends there. We are left with a God who needs a minimum number of righteous in order to save the town. If that number is not present then the individuals who are righteous, the chosen few, are saved, taken out of the context and the rest perish. This eventually happens in this story, it happens with Noah and the ark, it happens with Rahab and Jericho, it happens to a greater degree with the Israelites wandering in the wilderness until all of that wicked generation had died including Moses.

We find in the Old Testament that there comes a time when no more chances are left. We find that the evil of many outdoes and overpowers the righteousness of a few, even if there is always a chosen few who will be saved. In the NT with the coming of Christ we can sense a different approach. What we find with the Advent of Christ, what we find in the power of the resurrection, what we find in the empty tomb is the assurance for all of us that God is more influenced by righteousness than evil. We are liberated because we don't have to bargain and make deals with God because he has already given us one more last chance. Innocence and righteousness have the power to override the destruction of evil.

God, through Jesus Christ, actively seeks a way out of death for us all. In Christ there is no need for bargaining because Romans states Christ is the one who is righteous, the only one who is righteous, and that is all that God requires. Can you imagine if God came and asked, Ok if there are 10 righteous people here in Strasburg then I will not destroy it. He wouldn't find one on Main Street, he wouldn't find one on South Decatur, he wouldn't find one at FPC. There was the story of the German Nazi commander Eichmann who was on trial but nobody would step forward to accuse him of the atrocious

crimes that he committed. Finally one man did and Eichmann was behind the glass awaiting for the trial to continue with the witness to come forward. The witness came into the room and looked at Eichmann for the first time and fainted the second he saw him.

When he was awakened he was asked, why did you faint, did you remember all of the evil, all of the bad that you suffered under that monster. No, the witness replied, I looked at Eichmann, and what I saw was a man in a suit and I realized that he could have been anyone sitting there and that we are all capable of what that man did. That was too painful for me to bear. There is not one who is righteous in this town, no not one. So God did what only could be done, he sent his son Jesus Christ to be the righteous one for us in our place, to give us one more final chance.

Oh I can't wait for judgment day. We will be in heaven and Jesus will introduce us to the Father and he will say, let me introduce you to someone dad. This is Bob and through Christ and because of Christ he will say, Bob is perfect and complete in every way. There is nothing that he is lacking, there is nothing that you would want from him. I would really like for some people to be there and hear Jesus say that.

Think of it all those opportunities you've missed, all those bad decisions you've made, with Christ Jesus you have a second chance, an opportunity to allow the Father to see you as Christ sees you, perfect because of Jesus' action. What a great second chance we have.

But this second chance doesn't last forever. We have to receive it, claim it, and make a decision to follow Christ, otherwise we will just be included in those many who were not saved. This is what happens. We receive a second chance, one more final absolute chance through Christ. Won't you receive him and turn your life to follow him not because of your merit but because of God's grace. Amen.