

“Christ dies for sinners”

You have heard me say many times that the Church has its own language – because it has its own theology – its own doctrines – its own beliefs. The same is true with the world with its language, ideologies, doctrines and beliefs. And while we as Christians are not OF the world, we are still IN the world.

“Essential” and “non-essential” has become part of the language of the world in which we live. Certain people have been designated as “essential workers” – which means there are others who are non-essential. This language brings with it the idea that there are “essential people” – and therefore, also non-essential people.

The question is – who gets to determine such things? Using the best-construction – you could say that in the Old Testament reading – it is God who has determined that “the people of Israel” are essential. And they are! They are an essential part of God’s plan of salvation – for, it is through Israel that God has chosen to bring salvation to the world.

Of course, sinners are not by nature “best-construction” kind of people. We tend to put our own spin on “essential” and non-essential. While God is in it for the salvation of all people – sinners are in it for themselves. Sinners put certain values on people’s lives – and those values vary.

What can they do for me? That’s the question selfish, self-centered sinners are always asking. Do they contribute to society – or are they a drain on it? That question is used to determine whether time, effort and resources should be allocated, or not – and so the elderly and the handicapped are often on the losing end. How do they impact my life? What do they require of me? Those are often the questions behind the determination of whether the child in the womb is an “unwanted child” or not.

Behind all of this is a “scorekeeping” mentality – a system of assigning pluses and minuses – of keeping score of a person’s value, in relation to ourselves.

You buy me lunch – and I’ll have to buy you lunch next time (lunch – not an expensive steak supper!). You harm me – I’ll make sure you suffer in return. You lie about me – and I’ll smear your reputation in return. You cheat me, and I’ll look for the opportunity to get you back. You take what is mine – and I’ll take or destroy what is yours. It’s all about “getting even” – “settling the score” --- and in order to do that, one must keep score.

The Apostle Paul writes: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” ---- so sin has come to all mankind, making all people to be “by nature” – sinful, selfish, self-serving, scorekeepers.

This is life as we know it since Adam’s fall into sin and Adam and Eve were barred from the paradise of Eden. The closest glimpse we get of paradise today – is in those who sacrifice themselves for the sake of others.

Parents (though sinners), will often set their wants and desires aside for the children that they love. Their children and their needs become the focus of their lives. Before there are children to serve – the Lord joins one man and one woman as husband and wife – giving them a great gift (sinners though they are) – giving them someone else to love, besides themselves.

A soldier willingly enlists, knowing they may be put in very dangerous situations. Having the same selfish, “what’s in it for me” desires as the rest of mankind – yet, a soldier may even “dare to die” for the sake of their fellow soldier, or for their country.

In each of these examples – we see a picture of the selfless, sacrificial nature of God. We see God at work for the sake of others.

Though sin has come into the world through the one man, Adam – and thereby, the destruction and death that sin causes has come to all mankind – so, through the one man, Jesus Christ, life and salvation has come.

The one man, Jesus Christ, is a game changer! Look at what He does – and for whom! While we were still weak – for the ungodly – while we were still sinners – Christ died for us. While we were still enemies – He lays down His life to save us – to reconcile us to God.

The world preaches a whole different sermon. To the weak it says – “buck up, prove yourself, or get out of the way.” To the ungodly and the sinner it says – “straighten up, clean up your life, and then you might have a chance.” To the enemy – there is only war.

Into a world drowning in sin’s chaos and destruction – the Son of God Himself comes – in our flesh – to save us. In the Gospel reading – while they were still contagious with “every disease and every affliction” – while they were still “harassed and helpless” – to the sick, the dead, the lepers, the demon-possessed --- Jesus comes to save.

Dearly beloved, “the kingdom of heaven IS at hand.” Jesus comes to you today – not with a scorekeepers mentality – not saying that IF you first get your life straightened out, or prove yourself to be of some benefit, THEN I will make you to be my own. No, “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Jesus comes to you today with His free gift of grace. His love for you is truly undeserved – it is truly a gift. No scorekeeping – not requiring anything in return. It is “for you”

He washes away all your sin while still a helpless baby with nothing to offer – but with many needs. He cancels your debt by giving you His very own Body and Blood – because ungodly sinners need what only His blood can achieve – forgiveness. He absolves you, even while your sinful flesh struggles with rebellion against Him.

The first five verses of Romans 5 are important context for us to consider. They tell us that because Christ has died for you – because you are justified by faith – you have peace with God. And the result of that justification is that you “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Our sufferings, endurance, and character do not earn such love from God – it is the fruit that faith produces in us through the working of the Holy Spirit. It’s a game changer – a whole new way of living! Gone is the incessant scorekeeping and living in uncertainty about where you stand with God. In its place is Christ, His blood, His grace – so that your life abounds in hope and peace.

Dearly beloved, you are reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. You are His treasured possession – His beloved sheep. He lays down His life to save you – so that you may live eternally. Let us “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.