

“Your New Life in Christ”

(Philippians 2: 1-13)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last year we were inundated with fires raging all over the place, and warnings were issued on a daily basis urging people to evacuate or prepare for it. And this year we still have dire warnings on a daily basis, not about fires, but the COVID19 Pandemic. Unfortunately some people seem to feel that these warnings and predictions of harm won't affect them, or don't apply to them!

Warnings are issued in our Old Testament and Gospel Readings. God issues this warning through Ezekiel to Israel who started to think that God's ways of doing things are wrong, and they were going to do things their way:

“Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. . . . Repent and live!” [Ezekiel 18:30b, 32b]

In Today's Gospel Parable Jesus urges repentance from the sinners of his day. And he shocks the religious leaders who felt that the call to repentance didn't apply to them, since they were on the right side of God because they were so good, with these words:

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

The call to repentance is issued to us today, also, because we share the same human nature that makes us think that somehow we are on God's side because we have done good. We know that we are redeemed by God's grace. Paul explains this in his letters, and declares that salvation is by grace alone, we are saved by God's grace and not by our own efforts, not by anything we can say or do.

So to see today's reading end with the phrase, "**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**" comes as a shock! If our salvation is dependent upon us, then no wonder we need to tremble and fear.

This contradicts what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9 "**For by grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

So what does Paul mean by "**working**" out our salvation?

Salvation has become for many in our culture a goal to be achieved, obtained and maintained, by one's individual efforts. And being a Christian is an individual action.

But for the Apostle Paul, being a Christian isn't about being an individual so much as it's about being a people, a community - being the Body of Christ.

Christianity goes much deeper than simply confessing one's faith, believing the right things, or even doing the right things.

For Paul, being saved, being redeemed, means that a life-altering transformation has taken place, where the individual, through Jesus, is brought into relationship with God and to others – with a total commitment to the community of faith where they (as in verse 4) says "**look not to their own interests, but to the interests of others.**"

In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul reminds the Philippians of what they share together.

Verses 1-2 says: they share the same Christ, the same love, the same Spirit, and the same compassion and sympathy. Therefore, they are to be in full accord with one another having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

These are words to the Philippians, and to us, to remind us of our communal identity as Christ's own, our communal love for Christ, and our communal concern for one another and for others in Christ's name. Paul in Romans 6 verse 4 how and when this communal identity took place:

We were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

God empowers and strengthens us for this new life through Word and Sacrament, as we fellowship together in his name.

Paul says: "**work out your salvation.**" He is not telling us to work for our salvation, but to work **out** our salvation, or **work out our new life.**

Paul by making a plea for humility in the concluding verses:

You know this all-powerful God does not use God's superior power to evoke dread or fear and trembling.

No, God loves us.

And God shows God's love for us by setting aside His power, emptying himself and taking on the life of a humble, obedient, servant in Jesus Christ, and then giving up his life for us on the cross.

In love and humility, he selflessly gave up everything he had to secure the salvation of the world so that God highly exalted him and gave him the name that every tongue shall confess "Jesus Christ is Lord."

Now, how can we even begin, as Paul urges in verse 5, to have this same self-emptying humility of Christ in us?

The very essence of faith is the certainty of knowing that Christ has already saved us on the cross.

NOW, because we have already been saved by grace, we can faithfully and confidently and completely respond together as God's people doing God's work in the world, serving Christ by serving others with humility and love. **Amen.**

And the peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor John Simboras 27 September 2020