



Easter - April 24, 2011
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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

I'm Good Romans 5:6-8

Welcome to Easter at Chapel Hill! Whether you are a first-timer or a never-misser, we are really glad to see you! If you're not a regular church-attender you might be wondering if you are going to get picked on. Not a chance! Whatever prompted you to walk through our doors, we are so glad you're here. I hope you feel our warm welcome. And who knows...you might get hooked!

The other day, Pastor Jeremy was doing an Easter lesson for our pre-school kids. He sang "Jesus Loves Me" with them. How many remember that song? After that last line, Jeremy held up his Bible and said, "How many know what this is?" "A Bible!!!" "Now, does anyone know **where** in the Bible it says that Jesus loves me?" There was silence for a moment, and then one of the little boys pointed and said, "Where your bookmark is?"

Exactly! So, we're going to turn in the Bible to where my bookmark is and find out how much Jesus loves us this morning.

How many of you ever use the phrase, "I'm good?" "Can I get that for you?" "No, I'm good." "Can I help you with that?" "No, I'm good." The Toones use that phrase a lot. "Would you like me to get you a blanket?" "I'm good." "Dad, would you like seconds?" "No, I'm good." "Cooper, would you like sevenths?" "I'm good." (Actually, that's a myth. Cooper has never turned down sevenths; he's eating us out of house and home.) But you get the idea. "I'm good!" It's a nice way of saying, "Thanks, but I don't need what you are offering. I'm fine just the way I am. I don't need any help."

The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." Jesus told his disciples, "There is no greater love that a man can show than for him to lay down his life for his friends." Today's verse says, "God shows us how much he loves by sending his son to die for us." Again and again the Bible repeats the same message: God loves this world...God loves us...God loves you **so** much that he sent his son to die for you.

It's as if God is speaking to you from this book and saying, "Mark, Lisa, John, Lindsey... guess how much I love you. Guess what I've done for you! I sent my son to die for you! What do you say to that?" Now just imagine if our response was, "I'm good!" "But... but I sent my son, my precious son, to die for you." "I appreciate that, but I'm good!"

You realize that many in this building this morning are saying exactly that. "Yeah... Easter's cool. Good thing to do with the family... wonderful story... probably something to it. And I'm sure it's great for some folks. But for me, I'm good."

The basic assumption of Easter—of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus—is that we humans need help. We need saving. And honestly, that's not very easy for us Gig Harbor folks to take. We are not good at needing help. We have a beautiful town, beautiful homes, beautiful cars, beautiful lives, beautiful wives, and beautiful kids in the best schools. Our fences are up, our walls are up. We don't need helping. "I'm good! Help **me**? Save me? No thanks. Maybe someone else, somewhere else, but I'm good."

Except, that's not exactly what our Bible reading says, is it? When the Apostle Paul talks about why Jesus died he uses a couple of words to describe us. The first is in verse 8. "**While we were still sinners Christ died for us.**" What's the word? "Sinners." How many like hearing themselves described that way? Raise your hand. How many list your Facebook status as "sinner?" No one likes to be called a sinner. Right? It sounds judgmental, finger-wagging, holier-than-thou. "Sins" are that long list of all the things I'm not supposed to do. Murder, adultery, robbery, lying, cheating, coveting... And the average person will look at that long list and say, "Listen, I don't do this or this or this or this. **I don't do much of this. I stopped doing this—mostly—last week.** See, I'm not a sinner. I'm okay. Especially compared to some of those jerks in prison. Those guys are sinners. Those guys need saving. But me, I'm good!"

You know what? In one important way, you are absolutely right. **You are made in the image of God!** The Almighty God created you in his likeness. That **is** good! When you look at yourself in a mirror, you are looking at someone who bears the imprint of God. Animals don't have it... not in the same way. Plants don't. Only you—a human being who can love and dream and communicate and experience God—only you are made that way. "Hey, I'm created in the image of God. I'm good!" That's true.

There's just one problem. Do you know what it is? [*Smash mirror*] That goodness—that image of God in us—has been broken. Shattered in some cases. **That** is what sin is really about. That's what it means to be a "sinner." Not a long list of naughty things that you do or don't do. No... Jesus died for sinners because we are broken, and it breaks his heart. There are parts of our lives that we look at, and we can see fragments of what it's supposed to be—but it's not whole. It's in pieces. There is not a human being alive—not one person—even in Gig Harbor, Washington—who can look at that mirror without saying, "I've got stuff that is just broken inside of me."

Isn't that true for you? If you were being completely honest, could you really look back over your life and say, "There's not one hurt I've caused that I haven't been able to heal, not one relationship I've scarred that I haven't been able to repair, not

one thing about my marriage that I would change, not one moment of my parenting that I regret, not one time that I've humiliated my parents, not one time that I've abused sex. There's not one thing I would change; not one longing in my heart for something more. No regrets, no doubts, no guilt."

Can anyone here say that? **If so, I'd like to meet you!** On second thought, I don't think I would like to meet you. You would just make me feel awful! I don't think I'd enjoy being with you, because there are things that I have done in my life that shame me. Relationships... opportunities that I have squandered. Parts of my life that are just broken.

That's what Paul means when he says that I am a sinner. Not that there aren't some good things in me and about me. But on my own—left to my own devices—my life is still broken. Some of us into a few pieces. Some of us shattered. But all of us broken.

That's the first thing that Paul says about us. We are broken. Here's the other: **We are powerless to do anything about it.** *Poor Richard's Almanac* teaches us that, "God helps those who... help themselves." Ever heard that? Unfortunately, **it is exactly wrong.** The Bible says that God helps those who **cannot** help themselves. Verse 6: **You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**

How do you fix this? [*Broken Mirror*] How do I un-break what is broken? How do I make this [*broken mirror*] look like this [*whole mirror*]. Could you take care of that for me? Could you put all these pieces together? Could you go back and undo the hurts I've caused? Erase the pain I've caused. Could you do that for me? I'd sure appreciate it.

If we can admit that there are pieces of our lives that are just broken, it's easier to admit that there's nothing we can do to fix it. **That's why we need a Savior.** That's why God sent Jesus: to live a perfect, unbroken life—the only one ever to do it—to sacrifice himself for **our** broken lives, and then to rise from the dead and declare victory over brokenness and death. And invite us to live in wholeness. **In this life!** We often think about salvation as getting to heaven when we die, and who doesn't want to do that? Something like 85% of Americans believe that there **is** a heaven and most of those want to go there!

But salvation is also for right now. Jesus came to save our **lives**...and not just our deaths. He came to set our lives straight—set our marriages straight, set our families straight, set this world straight... right **now.** For every person who has the courage to admit, "I am broken. There are big chunks of my life that are just busted up, and I am powerless to do anything about it," Jesus says, "**Perfect! You need saving. I am the Savior. Let's get together.** Let me do for you what you cannot do for yourself!"

Last summer Chapel Hill hosted a gathering of 27 young Christians from around the world—Israeli Christians, Palestinian Christians and American Christians—in a project called the Sound & Sand Encounters. In fact, those young people are celebrating Easter together in Jerusalem right now! Our goal for this project was to explore how their common faith in Jesus could bridge the hatred and pain that exists between the Palestinian and Israeli people. We spent a lot of time developing relationships of trust. One of our activities was a hike up Mt. Rainier.

One of the American young adults is Jesse Hayes. Jesse is wheelchair-bound. He is a wonderful member of this group, but I didn't think he would be a very good candidate for a 2-mile hike up Rainier. Right? Wrong! The young men in the group tied a rope to Jesse's wheelchair. One pulled on it while another pushed it up the asphalt walking path at Paradise. They continued that way for **half a mile**. But then we came to the end of the asphalt, and I assumed that Jesse's small group would just stop there. Wrong again.

My group was up ahead, and as we were sitting there I looked back down the mountain. This is what I saw. An Israeli young man named Chaim was carrying Jesse on his shoulder up that steep trail! When they reached us Chaim was exhausted. He set Jesse on a boulder and then everyone—Palestinian, Israeli and Americans—gathered around Jesse and prayed some of the most inspiring prayers I have ever heard.

I will never forget that image. One of our members was so touched by the story she painted this picture. And this is a perfect illustration for our text this morning, don't you think? Jesse was powerless. He couldn't get himself up that trail. Chaim said, "I can help you. If you'll let me, I will pick you up and put you over my shoulder and we will climb a mountain together. Whaddya say?"

So what would you have said? If you were Jesse, what would you have said? "I'm in! I can't do this without you, but I want to do it. So yes. Pick me up. Let's go. I'm in!" Or maybe, "I'm good! I'm too embarrassed; too proud. What would other people think? Thanks, but no thanks. I'm good!" Or he might have said, "I'm open. The idea scares me. It makes me really uncomfortable. But it looks great up there! So let's talk about it some more. I'm open."

What **did** Jesse say? "Chiam in! Let's climb a mountain!" And they shared a trip of a lifetime.

That is what the cross of Jesus means... and his empty tomb. Jesus looks at us and says, "You are so precious to me. You look just like Dad! I can see the image of my Father in you. But I can also see where your life is broken. **You cannot fix these things yourself**, but I can. **You are powerless**, but I'm not. I can take the broken parts of your life and make them whole again. So whaddya say? I want to carry you to a higher place. Will you let me?"

It takes courage to do what Jesse did. It is not easy to admit, "I need help. I am powerless to do this on my own." It is not easy to admit, "**I'm not good**—not really." I wonder, though, if there are some here this morning who long for something more in life; who are **ready** to say, "I **do** need help."

That is what Easter is about. It's not about candy eggs and chocolate bunnies, or beautiful new dresses. Easter is about new life, new beginnings—**new hope for the broken and the helpless that have the courage to turn to the resurrected one**. Does any of this ring true for any of you today? Is there any part of your life that needs saving? Jesus stands ready to carry you to a higher place. Will you let him?

I had the most wonderful Good Friday this year. I was invited to visit a 43 year-old man in his home. He is dying of colon cancer. He has a few weeks left. He wanted to talk to me about doing his funeral. So we talked. He had lots of questions about dying and heaven and hell and Jesus. We talked for 80 minutes and at the end of our time, my new friend received Jesus into his heart. He asked Jesus to save him—for this life and for eternity. It was great! I gave him a Bible and some verses to read and told him I'd visit him again. And as I left, he said, "This will be the best Easter of my life." Yes it will.

For some of you, this could be the best Easter of your life, too. This could be the Easter when you stop saying, "I'm good!" and instead say, "I'm in! I need help. I want what is broken in me to be made whole. Jesus, please save me." Do you long for that?

There's card in your bulletin. Fish it out. I'd like you to answer a question. No one else will see this; it's just for you. But I'd like you to write down one of three things just to help clarify your own thoughts: "I'm in, I'm good or I'm open."

"I'm in" means, "I believe it. I believe Jesus came for me, that he can save me and I want him to save me today and tomorrow and for the rest of my life." Whether that's the first time you've said it—or the umpteenth time. "I'm in."

"I'm good" means, "It's not for me. For others, maybe, but I can't commit myself to this sort of thing right now." For some of you, that will be an honest answer.

"I'm open" means, "I want to know more. I'm not sure about this; but I would like to investigate. Maybe this is something I could commit to, but I need to ask some questions first."

Just take a moment to think about what your response would be, and then write it down. I want everyone to write something.

Whatever you wrote—whatever questions you might have—**do we have an offer for you!** Over the next week Pastor Jim is going to be waiting somewhere in the

Harbor to talk with you over a cup of coffee. Whether you are “in” or “good” or “open,” Jim would be a great guy to talk to. He will just listen if you want him to. He will try and answer some questions if you want him to. But he’d love to spend some time with you. You’ll find the times and places on the back of Jesse’s picture. Starting tomorrow! I hope you’ll come.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read the passage out loud.**

- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.

- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don’t teach! Listen and reflect on God’s word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **Pray together:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **Dig deeper**

1. Read Romans 5: 6-8. What does the word “sinners” evoke in you? How has that word been misused? Did Pastor Mark’s use of the mirror help your understanding? How?

2. Paul describes us as being “powerless.” What does he mean? How do we do at admitting our powerlessness, especially here in Gig Harbor? Is there something in your life right now over which you feel powerless?

3. Jesus once said that the greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. Paul seems to up the ante in verse 8. How? Do you have an enemy? Can you imagine dying for them? What does that comparison do for your understanding of Jesus’ love?