

# Sermon for Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

**Date:** September 27, 2020

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Job 38:4-18

**Epistle Reading:** Romans 10:5-17

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 14:22-33



**Sermon Text:** Romans 10:5-17

**Sermon Title:** We Are People with a Purpose

**Introit:** Psalm 147:1-5; Antiphon: Psalm 147:6

## Hymns:

LSB 571 – God Loved the World so That He Gave

LSB 587 – I Know My Faith is Founded

LSB 555 – Salvation unto Us Has Come

## Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184



## Songs:

I Love You Lord

In Christ Alone

Our God is an Awesome God

This I Believe

## Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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## **Text: Romans 10:5-17**

Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In 1961, a visitor walked into the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, in Glasgow Scotland, carrying a brick. He found a painting of the crucifixion and started to destroy it. His anger, his violence, his desecration of Christian art was not done out of hatred for Christianity but out of love for Christ. He objected to the way the artist had portrayed the crucifixion of Jesus.

Salvador Dali was the artist and the painting was Christ of St. John of the Cross. In it you see Jesus, hanging on the cross over the world. The problem for the visitor was one of perspective. Dali had changed the traditional view people have on the crucifixion. Instead of standing below the cross looking up into the face of Jesus, Dali asks the viewer, for a moment, to look down on the cross from above Jesus, who Himself is looking down on the world. For this visitor it was sacrilegious to place yourself above Jesus.



Others actually see this new as divine. Others see what this vandal didn't. They see an artist inviting you to have God's perspective. Our heavenly Father looks down on this fallen world and He sees it through the eyes of Jesus dying on the cross for all people.

That view is hard for many people to see. As we look at the world we can often see something from which we want to run, rather than run toward. We see the fabric of God's creation being torn apart from its very foundation. We see same sex marriage, divorce, and couples living together without marriage altering God's plan of one man and one woman for a lifetime, and we see it being accepted more and more, and bothering us less and less. We see complacency in the killing of children in the womb for profit and medical experiments and ardent fights to preserve the nesting places of animals. This speaks of a world that has lost its moral compass. Rather than valuing all of life, our world encourages us to value only some life; human life often begin placed least on the list.

How easy it is for us to come to church and turn our eyes up to the cross and leave the world behind. All we can see is Jesus and in seeing Him we can forget where we are, or what He would have us do. We can gaze at Jesus, hanging there on the cross, dying for us and forget that we live in the world and that God has called and commissioned us to be involved in His mission,<sup>1</sup> right here right now.

Remembering and realizing that sudden;y makes it harder to look at Dali's "Crucifixion" because there we cannot escape the world by looking at Jesus. In this picture we find Jesus asking us to see the world as He does. Jesus hangs there, below

1 Mathew 28:19-20

us, offering His life for us. He wants us to see the world through the cross, as we live and spread God's mission of love for all people!

In Paul's letter to the Romans this is the perspective He has on the world. This is the vision the apostle Paul was inviting Christians then, and now, to see. God has called us to be part of His people for His purpose of reaching out to the very ends of the earth with Jesus' saving love.

As we look through the words of Paul today we will consider two details of Paul:

- 1) We are people saved by grace.
- 2) we are people involved in God's mission.

### **I. God's people - saved by grace, not by works:**

One of the odd things about Dali's depiction of the crucifixion is the body of Jesus. If you look closely at his painting you will notice that Jesus hangs on the cross without any wounds. There are no nails. His body hangs from the cross with nothing holding him to it. There is a deep spiritual insight in this painting. When Jesus was crucified, by one perspective we nailed Him to the cross. His own people tried Him, found Him guilty of blasphemy, and rejected Him, their Savior. That however is not the only reason Jesus hung on the cross. He could have come down Himself if he wanted to.

Remember, on the night when Jesus was betrayed, how Peter drew his sword. Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?"<sup>2</sup> When Jesus hung on the cross, the "church leaders" mocked Him. They called for Him to come down from the cross and save Himself. But Jesus stayed on the cross, not because He is only human and could not get down, but because He is truly God and would not get down.

Jesus stayed on the cross because He didn't come to this world to save Himself. He came to save you. It is the pure love of God that led Jesus to that cross, and it is the pure love of God that held Jesus on that cross, offering His sinless life for for you. Jesus hanging on the cross without nails is not a realistic depiction of what happened, but it is what happened. Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for you.

This is what that the apostle Paul want you to understands. Salvation comes to us purely by grace. It is only by the love of God, poured out for us through Jesus, that we are saved. That is what makes us part of God's greater story, part of God's greater people saved by grace.

2 Matthew 26:33

As Paul proclaims this truth to the Christians in Rome, he does it by revisiting a familiar quote from Scripture. Just as Dali took a traditional picture of the crucifixion and offered new perspective, so Paul took a traditional text and asked us to hear it in a new light. Paul turns to the book of Deuteronomy. The record of covenant renewal among God's people. They are there on the edge of the Promised Land. After 40 years in the wilderness they are about to enter, but before they do God renews His covenant with them.

In the beginning of that covenant renewal God warns the people about how they should view this moment. Moses says:

**Do not say in your heart** after God has thrust [the nations] out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land...

Know therefore that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.<sup>3</sup>

Moses asks them to look at their past. They were a stubborn people and did not earn the gift they were about to be given. At the end of that covenant renewal God prophesies to the people of Israel. He speaks of a time when they will abandon God and be exiled from their land. Later they will repent and God will bring restoration. Here Moses asks them to see their future. Their future lies only in the mercy of God.

It is that vision of the future that Paul quotes here. Only, as Paul quotes this vision from Scripture, he adds his own words to emphasize his point. He wants us to see the love of God, freely given for all people. Listen to what Paul writes.

The righteousness based on faith says, "**Do not say in your heart**, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim.<sup>4</sup>

For Paul, that day of restoration had come to God's people. It had come in Jesus Christ and it had come purely by grace. With these words, Paul reaches out to his Jewish brothers and sisters and invites them to join with the Roman Gentile Christians in confessing salvation by grace, through faith.

3 Deuteronomy 9:4,6

4 Romans 10:6-8

At the heart of God's covenant lies, not what we do for our salvation, but rather what God does for us. We are saved not because we are mighty, or numerous, or particularly holy. We are stubborn rebellious sinners before God, but we are saved by God's mercy, made known to us in Jesus Christ. At the heart of God's restoration of all things lies the work of God in Jesus. He came down from heaven, died and he rose again, so that we might be forgiven, and be part of God's people who live by grace through faith.

## **II. God's mission – using His people to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth**

As Paul offers a vision of life in the Promised Land, Heaven, he helps us see Jesus. He also helps us see Jesus at work through His people in the world. As you listen to this part of the book of Romans notice how the Promised Land is not limited to a small piece of land. When Paul continues writing he reveals this world-encompassing mission of God. He writes

The Scripture say, 'Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'<sup>5</sup>

In Paul's words make it clear this salvation is for all people. God's mission is to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. For Paul, that mission of God is not something that merely a pie in the sky fantasy. Paul brings that mission of God down to earth, into the very mouths of God's people who are called to speak it. Paul asks a series of questions to which the answers are obvious:

How are they to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News!'"

God brings people into His kingdom through the word of faith that His people proclaim.<sup>6</sup>

5 Romans 10:13

6 Romans 10:14-15

Paul understands that he is part of this mission. He anticipates traveling to Spain in a missionary journey and wants to stop in Rome on the way. His stop in Rome, however, will not be a one way conversation, with Paul telling them what to believe. Paul anticipates he too will hear words of encouragement and spiritual power from them. He writes in the opening of this letter:

I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.<sup>7</sup>

Paul knows this truth about God’s greater story. When God brings people into His kingdom, He brings them into His mission, His mission that extends to the ends of the earth. God gives all of us a confession of faith, a word of faith that when spoken touches others with the power of God. Paul writes that the Gospel of God “is the power of salvation to all who believe.”<sup>8</sup> Paul wants the Roman Christians to know and you, as God’s people today, to know that you have a purpose in God’s kingdom. God uses you in His mission to share with others the Good News.

Dali’s painting offers us a visual reminder of this work of God. There, in the heights of heaven is the cross. Jesus, in love, offering His life for the world. There below Him is the world. It extends outward into the distance. This love of God is a love that will reach to the ends of the earth. The question, however, is how is this love to be communicated to all of those people. How will God make His saving love known?



There at the bottom of the picture, you see the answer. Two men, going about their task of fishing near the boat. They seem to be plain men. Fishermen. Nothing would set them apart as God’s special instruments to the world. Yet, that is what happens in the ministry of Jesus. He comes and calls ordinary people to follow Him. Ordinary people who are invited to live with Jesus. To listen to Jesus and to bear witness what He has done.

I’ve often thought about those apostles and the challenge that was before them. They ordinary men. What did they know about public speaking or oratory? What did they know about the intricacies of the Greek language? It would be like giving a child a box of crayons and asking him to paint the Sistine Chapel. God’s work, however, comes not through human eloquence or wisdom. It comes in the foolishness of the Gospel, a story so simple that even a child could tell it. A story so amazing that only God could bring it.

7 Romans 1:11-12

8 Romans 1:16

This work of Jesus, sending His Spirit to speak through His people, was not limited only to the apostles. As persecution rose in Jerusalem, the people were scattered as the apostles stayed, willing to die for the faith. The people were the ones who carried the message with them. I'm sure that their words were not the most skillful nor the most eloquent. They were probably simple testimonies of faith, but through their simple words, God's work of mission was done. Through your simple words, His work is done today. You don't need special training to speak of what God has done for you. As Paul writes, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." God has called you, chosen you, to be His people who live by His promise and live for His purpose and His mission to bring salvation to the ends of this earth.

### **Conclusion:**

After a visitor attacked Dali's painting it was removed from the art museum. Through careful work, the painting was restored and, over time, brought back to the museum. Today, thousands of visitors go to Glasgow to see this painting. They stand there and marvel at the beauty of Dali's work.

Paul, however, knows of another restoration that causes God's people to stand there in wonder. Paul sees that in Christ God has fulfilled his promises to Abraham. Through this one nation, God has brought salvation to all the nations of the earth. Through this one person, his son Jesus Christ, God has offered a love that encompasses all people.

As we come to worship today, Paul asks us to stand here, to look up, and see Jesus. But we don't only see Jesus. No, Paul changes our perspective so that we see Jesus at work through his people bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Paul wants us to catch that vision. It catches your breath and causes you to cry out with wonder: "how beautiful . . . how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,  
Encourage one another in faith,  
Witness to God's love and  
Serve all people**

