

## Mountain View Lutheran Church

Sunday, May 29, 2011

### Sermon by Pastor Mark Friedrich (as transcribed from recording)

My dear Christian friends would you read this with me? “Christ died for the sins once for all the righteous, for the unrighteous to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. What does that mean? Look at those words. Christ died for sins. Once for all times. Have you ever in your life thought about things you’ve done in the past and maybe you’d say “Well, can I have a do-over?” Or, “How am I ever going to pay for what has happened?” Or, maybe in my life I make myself pay. Or maybe somebody around me is keeping the guilt trip on and says “You’re going to pay for the rest of your life!”

It’s not an uncommon thing to experience. Read those words again. “Christ died for the sins once for all time.” If there’s anything that can help you unburden, it’s to realize what Jesus did on the cross was take all of the past mistakes and pay for them. Once for all times, for all people, of all circumstances, all sin has been paid for. That’s the promise we have in Jesus Christ and it was a great payment. The righteous one, the one who was without sin, the one who knew no sin, the one who never messed up - who could have said, “You’re guilty and until you shape up your life I’m not going to do anything for you!” - but didn’t. The righteous one willingly laid down His life for the unrighteous. That’s you and me, if you haven’t figured that one out.

Now there are some churches that say, “Come to Jesus.” That’s not what scripture says. Read those words – “to bring you to God.” God comes to us. That’s the whole message of the incarnation of God becoming flesh and blood, and through Jesus’ suffering and death, He brought us - who could never get to God, never come to Him, never even want to come to God. He brought us to God. Oh, what grace! While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The righteous for the unrighteous. He was put to death in the body and that could have been the rest of the story, except He was made alive in the Spirit! We are resurrection people as Christians. Because Christ lives, we, too, live! We have that new life in Christ. Christ has filled the gap that our sins made, so that we now are brought to God.

And that message has been proclaimed. Not only to the whole world, but even to the devil himself! You know, in the Creed we say “and Jesus descended into hell.” Do you know why He descended into hell? To do just this: He went to preach to the spirits in prison who had disobeyed. Now, He didn’t go there to evangelize and bring them out of there. They were there because it’s appointed for all people to die once and then the judgment. But He went down to hell to say “In your face Satan! I’m alive! Death has been defeated!” And nothing can ever come between us and our Savior. Not even all those past mistakes, because they’ve been nailed to the cross. You see, Jesus is our Savior, he’s our deliverer. He has defeated us; He has defeated all of our enemies. Just like He did in the Old Testament.

Remember that beautiful story of Noah’s ark? You know that’s not just some fable, some made up story, that’s real! In that ark, 8 people were saved. Do you know why only 8 people were saved? Was it God only wanted 8 people? No.

The ark had 3 levels, and engineers that have measured that said that all the food for a year's journey could be fit on one level. All the animals of the world could be fit on the second level and there'd be one more level left. Now, do you think that was space enough for 8 people? Well, when you look about today and see people's houses, you say "Well maybe there wasn't enough room." But that ark was big enough to house a lot of people! And the Bible says that Noah for 120 years was a preacher of righteousness, but nobody listened to him! They all laughed at him. And when they had the chance to get in the boat they didn't, but those who did, were saved. Those who trusted in the promise of God were saved.

You see, God doesn't force us, He gives us. And this story of salvation reminds us of baptism. Luther says if you're having a bad day, remember you're a baptized child of God. Do you know he learned that lesson from his wife? His wife Katie. One day when things weren't going so good, Luther was in kind of a foul mood, and so Katie came down dressed in her funeral dress. Luther looked at her and he said "Who died?" And Katie says "Well, the way you've been acting, I thought God died!" You know it's great to have a good wife that knocks you between the eyes sometimes.

Baptism. Remember your baptism, because God is alive. And even on the worst days, we are baptized children of God. We are saved. And all the problems that we have in this life are only temporary. They are. God has an eternal solution for us. And that's in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because we are baptized children of God.

We, too, will have that new life forever with Him and what a life it will be. We are alive in Christ right now! We've been called out of darkness to live for him each and every day. You know, I'll admit it, I get depressed sometimes. And I'll admit that I'm a hard person to live with some days. That's why I need to be reminded again and again of that new life of God in us, in me. And that new life is seeking to do good.

God calls us to let our light so shine before the whole world that when people see us, they're going to say "There's something different about you. You don't handle the problems of this life in the same way that I do. What do you got that I don't have?" And I'll tell you what, that comes from our faith in Jesus Christ. When we live for Him each day, that's how we bring praise and glory to God.

But you know what? Even when we do good for others - and why do we do good for other people? Because we're trying to repay God? I don't think so. Can't do it. Why do we do good for God? So we can earn His favor or a few more brownie points? I don't think so. We do good because that's that new life in us. Any good you see in me is Christ living in and through me. But you know when people see that good in us, they get a little suspect.

I was talking to a person the other day and their son said "You know you had that chapel and you gave the kids that went to chapel treats every time?" And his son said "You know all they're doing in that church is bribing people." See? It's a matter of perspective, isn't it. So, I came up to that young man with a big sack of cookies and I said "This is a gift not a bribe. I do it because I like you, but I love Jesus. Enjoy."

But you see the only reason Christians are hated is because we serve the Lord. When we serve the Lord, we're going to be persecuted. We will suffer for it. Thank God we live in the United States of America where at least now we don't have the full sufferings that many Christians have had, many of the types of martyrdom. But even if it would come to that the Lord says "Don't fear. I'm going to take care of you. I won't leave you as orphans. Don't be frightened." God is in control. If He's brought us this far, He will bring us through. That's His promise.

So put your hearts on Jesus. Set your lives upon Him. Make Christ the solid rock of your whole life. Because everything else is going to disappoint you. Relationships are going to disappoint you, people are going to disappoint you, finances will disappoint you, but only when we set our hearts upon Jesus will we truly find rest and peace for our souls. And then be prepared to give an answer.

Now, that begs the question, "Why should we be prepared to give an answer?" Because people are going to be asking, "Why are you so nice?" "Why do you always have a smile on your face?" "Why do you always look like you drank a gallon of pickle juice?" If we're prepared to give an answer, that means people are going to ask us, because our lives are going to be different. We're going to have hope that the others don't have. But when we do it, we do it with gentleness and respect.

You know, I've seen some street preachers yelling and screaming at people. I've seen people who have talked to others who are in cults and just trash them! That's not a Christian witness. You know when we sing that song "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war," it doesn't mean that we sharpen up our swords or get out our M-16's. It means we do battle with the Word and we do it with respect and love. But we do it in such a way, that even though we are accused by those around us as doing something wrong, we are above reproach. We keep our conscience clear because the motivation we do for things is not inappropriate, it's because we love the Lord. And know that when we suffer, it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

If we must be persecuted someday - if I have to go to jail some day, I hope and pray the charge is "he preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I'll go with a smile on my face and a song on my lips, because that's the reason that we live.

So each day, each and every day of your life, live for Jesus. Remember that it was He who bore our sins, paid for our sins, once for all. The righteous for the unrighteous, that we might be set free to live for Him and through Him, today, tomorrow and for eternity. Amen.