

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 18, 2006
2nd Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:8-10
Pastor Del Kannenberg

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 5:12-15
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 126
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Gospel: Mark 2:23-28

God's Plan of Salvation

It was right around 50 years ago when I met a young lady that I wanted to get to know better. After interacting with that person for awhile, both of us thought we were in love. So about 48 years ago, we decided we wanted to spend the rest of our lives with each other. We thought we were in love. But as time went on, suddenly we realized that what we thought was love almost 50 years ago, is no where near the love that can be developed between a husband and a wife. Living together as husband and wife you share many joys, and you also are there for one another in times of trial. We found that there were many common interests and yet we also saw conflict. And yet in sharing those common interests and dealing with the conflicts that we faced, we knew that one could always count on the other and there was a foundation of love that was built that is beyond compare. It is far more than what could have ever been imagined 50 years ago.

But I am using that as an example and an illustration of what God intends for us in his Sabbath Day law. God wants us to come to know him better and so he set aside one day that should be a day of rest—a day of spiritual rest, a day where God can come to us through Word and Sacrament and reveal his heart of love for us so that even while we were still sinners, we know that Christ loved us. It is a day where God the Holy Spirit is continually reaching out to us through his Word and with the Sacraments and so that we might know the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ by the power and work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

So this morning as we gather together on this Sabbath Day and we look for that spiritual rest that God has in store for us, we consider these words of Scripture and we see God's gracious plan of salvation revealed to us. God's great plan of salvation is revealed first of all to us, but then by the second part of this text, we also see that it is continually being revealed also through us. *For it is by grace you have been saved* (Ephesians 2:8). Saved from what? We have been saved from eternal destruction. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, sin had separated man from God. They were driven out of the Garden. Now sin was that wall of separation between God and man.

Remember that God is the source of every blessing. Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of heavenly life. That is **every** good and **every** perfect gift. So what does that mean when we are separated from our God? That means that we are cut off from the source of **every** good. So what should you and I expect because of our sins?—nothing but evil. No goodness at all. No sunshine. No fair weather. No rain. No companionship. No family. No joys at all—just misery, hardship and eternal destruction.

That is where you and I are in relationship to God by nature and yet it is by grace that God reaches out to us through his Word and Sacraments. It is by grace that we have been saved. Grace is that love from God that we do not deserve. All that God does for us and to us is out of love and mercy.

Look at how God treated the people in the Old Testament time. He led them through the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Was it for punishment because of their disobedience and grumbling and complaining? No, he was training them. He was teaching them the consequences of sin so that they might realize the consequence of sin and the need for his grace and his love and mercy. He fed them for those 40 years. Their shoes and clothing did not wear out.

Why did God lead the children of Israel into the captivity of Babylon for those 70 years? For the same reason—they were falling away from God and God had to remind them that he was the source of their blessing. So he led them into captivity to teach them and train them. Finally some of the people returned to the Lord their God and were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem so that the Messiah might come; the Savior might come and be born in Bethlehem.

It is by grace alone that God is reaching out to us and he is giving us this Sabbath Day so that we might come to know his love and grow in his love and gladly hear his Word and keep it.

What is our attitude towards the worship service on a Sunday morning? Do we go because we want to have a good reputation among our fellow church members? Do we go because we feel we owe it to God? After all, he has done good things for us so now we owe him something in return, right? Do we come to church because we want to hear an eloquent message preached from the pulpit? That will not happen. We come because of the Word of God. That Word of God brings blessings. That love of God revealed to us touches our hearts so that Luther, in his Third Commandment explanation says we should gladly hear his Word and keep it and not defy the preaching and his Word. Our reason for coming is because God is making himself known through his Word. In the same way that we become more acquainted with friends and a friendship develops, God wants a loving relationship and a confident trust to be built between us and him.

It is by grace—God's grace and his love for us alone that saves us. The depth of God's love is seen in how Christ Jesus came into this world. Even though we should be separated from God for all eternity, we do not deserve even the least of his blessings, we do not deserve even a moment of joy and gladness, we deserve eternal wrath and punishment from God and yet, out of love, he reaches out to us and reveals to us his saving work—how Christ Jesus was born of a woman. He took upon himself human flesh and blood.

Do you ever stop to think about that act in itself? How the Creator God and our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. John's Gospel, was active in the work of Creation. How the Savior, the Son of God who was God, would lay aside his divine nature and take

upon himself our human flesh and blood. The Creator and Ruler of all things becoming part of the Creation, allowing himself to be born of the Virgin Mary, cared for as an infant and allowing himself to be grown up—so he was in all regards human, even as you and I, because the Scripture clearly tells us that he acquired wisdom and favor with God and man. He had to learn in the same way that you and I had to learn. So when the children in Sunday School and Catechism have to learn their catechetical lesson, it should be a joy and they should gladly learn that truth from God because their God is revealing his heart of love. He went the way of the cross. He took upon himself our sin and guilt and paid the price when he himself was separated from his Father in heaven when he cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34). He took that wall of separation upon himself. He was separated from the divine heavenly Father. He was left without any blessing at all and suffered the torment of hell in our place so that you and I never need to face that complete separation from God. Even in our most difficult trials and troubles, God promises, "I will be with you. I will help you. I will keep you in all of your ways."

Yes, we face troubles in life, but not complete separation from God. And through the troubles that we encounter in life, God is revealing to us his great love when he relieves us from those troubles. Even when we face the trial of death itself, he promises to receive us into his everlasting glory. Everlasting glory—where there will be no more weeping or crying, pain or sorrow, only joy in the presence of God forevermore.

The Sabbath Day rest that God invites us to is again before us. But it is by grace that we have been saved, through faith. That faith is worked by the Holy Spirit in us and that faith is also worked by the Holy Spirit through us. In the second part of our text we read, *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). *For we are God's workmanship*—that **for** is not a motivational preposition. That phrase is not to motivate us and encourage us. No, that **for** is a consequential **for**—meaning thereby that this is a consequence of our salvation, our being brought to faith. This is the result of God's grace in us. When you read the section in its context, you will realize that there is no motivational element in that verse itself. He is revealing to us the consequence. This is the result. Your reason for gathering around that Word of God on the Sabbath Day is a result of God having worked faith in you and God having revealed his heart of love to you. That is the result. So we are God's workmanship to do good work.

So what are you doing this morning? You are being nurtured. You are being fed. You are being strengthened by that Word of God and by the grace of God. You are encouraging one another as you join together with one another singing hymns of praise to God. Also, as a Christian congregation, you reach out to your community and with other Christian congregations, as a synod, you extend that kingdom of grace around the world. That is the work that God has prepared in advance for us to do. That work obviously begins at home. For faith is from one heart of faith passed on to another. So as fathers and mothers pass that heart of faith on to their children, God's kingdom of faith is being extended. You are God's workmanship doing the work that God has prepared in advance for you to do.

God's workmanship—when you and I talk to other people, it is not going to be with persuasive words as the apostle Paul wrote in his epistle. It is going to be by the power of the Holy Spirit through that faith that we have come to know and that we have to share with others. So what do you have to say to a friend who is grieving? God has promised he will never leave us nor forsake us. We can boldly say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear." That is the foundation of my faith. That is the foundation upon which I build when I face troubles. That same God who is there for me can also be there for your friend who is grieving or facing troubles in life. He will also afterwards receive us into his glory. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but again by his grace. For it is by grace we have been saved, through faith and it is not of ourselves. It is strictly a gift from God. It is a gift that you and I have received and a gift that you and I can pass on to others.

When that heart of love is filled, it will be overflowing. As we gather on a Sabbath Day around that Word, as God touches our hearts and fills our hearts with his love, that love will be overflowing so that it will be seen in your actions of life and it will also be witnessed by your words of encouragement, comfort and sharing the faith that you have within you.

Let that love of God fill your heart. May that love of God strengthen and be your foundation when you face troubles in life. May that love of God be your hope of eternal life which Christ Jesus has already prepared for you. With that love of God filling your heart and your life, your love to spouse is also going to grow because as God has loved us, so we will love one another. As God for Christ's sake has forgiven us, so we will also be forgiving to one another—not only our spouse, not only our children and children to parents, but friends and neighbors alike. God's grace fills our hearts and it shows in our living.

Continue to gather around that Word—not only on the Sabbath, but also in your home devotion so that God may come to you and speak to your heart and fill you with lasting peace, joy and gladness.