

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 19, 2006
7th Sunday after Epiphany
Psalm 130
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 43:13-25
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 130
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

God Has Always Been Loving

You children here this morning, you had last Thursday off of school, right? Did your parents tell you that they used to have storms like that in their day about every other day of the week? That it used to be a lot different way back when, the storms were always like that, and nowadays we just don't have the storms like we used to? Did you get to hear any of that this past week?

Sometimes we spend a lot of time talking about how things have changed, don't we? Things aren't the way they used to be, whether it is the weather or whether it is something else. Maybe sometimes we even think that things have changed when it comes to God. Maybe we think that the division between Old and New Testament in our Bible is the way of saying God dealt with people one way in the past and now he deals with people a different way in the New Testament.

If we ever think that way, this morning the reading we just heard from Psalm 130 really teaches us that weather might change, but one thing that never changes is God's love. God's love and the way God works among people has always been the same. That is what we are reminded of this morning. He didn't deal one way with the people in the Old Testament and a different way with us. His way of dealing with people throughout the course of history has always been love. God has always been loving. He has always been the source of salvation—not keeping the Law. He has always been forgiving.

Then we see this morning also that his love is unending. That is what gives us confidence. It gives us purpose. It gives us hope in the midst of some terrible things that you could say maybe never change.

The Psalmist starts out, *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD*. That hasn't changed in the 3000 years since this Psalm has been written, has it? People still find themselves in the depths at times in this life, don't they? The depths of uncertainty—the depths of uncertainty about physical health, the depths of uncertainty about financial health, the depths of uncertainty about, “what is my child doing? My child has strayed away from me, from God.” There are a lot of things in this life that put us in the depths. There are a lot of things that are going to cause us to cry out from the depths that we are going to face while we walk this earth and it is obvious, isn't it? It is obvious because of sin.

Sometimes we get in the depths because we ourselves have sinned and we haven't dealt with our guilt by taking it to Christ and his cross. Sometimes we deal with our guilt

the way others tell us to, by saying it's the other person's fault. By saying it's not that bad. At least we didn't do what so and so did. Sometimes we don't deal with the sins we have committed and we end up in the depths because of our own actions. Sometimes though we are going to be in the depths in this world because it is a sinful world and because of the actions of those around us, or just the results of living in a sin-filled world. Sin in general has made this world no longer perfect the way the Lord intended it, so at times we are going to be in the depths. There is no denying that.

That is when we need God's love. That is when we need to cry out to the Lord—not run away from the Lord, not blame the Lord, but cry out to the Lord and put our confidence, our hope, in his Word as the Psalmist does. *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.* What do you find whenever you go into God's Word? You are going to find over and over that God is loving—always has been, always will be. He forgives our sins.

We talk a lot about forgiveness of sins, don't we? When saying the Creed this morning, didn't you just say you believe in the forgiveness of sins? "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Do you ever think about that phrase and what exactly it means? Do you read it and say that sometimes and think to yourself that you believe others should forgive you? Or "I believe that God forgives me?" But do you notice that we don't say, "I believe in the forgiveness of MY sins." We say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin."

Are we good at doing that? Are we good at not only knowing that God has forgiven our sins, but living in response to that to forgive other people the sins they have committed against us? *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?* Think about it from our point of view. Do we keep a record of sins?

When you see a person's face, can you still flash back to words they said that hurt you two, five, eight, ten years ago? Does that pain still come up every now and then when you see their face or hear their voice? Do you get to a certain place and someone did something that hurt you deeply, does that record start playing over? If it was just a record, we would have ground out the needle long ago, wouldn't we, as good as you and I are at carrying grudges against other people at times. We don't keep a record of sins. That doesn't have enough data. We have a two gigabyte hard drive of sins real or perceived that we think were committed against us and we are calling them to mind quite often as we go through our daily lives. Then we say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Do we recognize we are teaching ourselves something as well?

Think about it. If God kept a record of sins, who could stand? All we heard was the voice. We heard the action. We saw the action. We maybe perceived something that wasn't even intended and yet, eight, ten years from now someone will say, "Don't you remember when you did this or that to me." Or you might say that to someone else. We keep that record.

But God knows what is in our hearts. God knows our thoughts. God knows all those things that we are happy we hide from each other. Yet God sees it and it is a stench to him, but it is right there for him. It is right there in front of him. He knows every last thing that we would not want anyone to know. But our God doesn't keep a record of

those sins that we commit. Our God doesn't call them to mind. If he did, we would have no hope. We would have no confidence. We would be in the depths for ever and ever and never be able to claw our way out of them. But God does not keep a record of sins. With him is forgiveness, because he himself redeemed Israel from all their sins. He himself came to this earth and took all of our sins on him. That is why God doesn't call them to mind, because in God's eyes they have already been paid for. They have already been punished. The punishment has been handed out fully and completely and absolutely. That is why we can cry out to the Lord from the depths and know that with God there is forgiveness.

That is why, as Christians, we have the ability—it is there at our fingertips in the Gospel of Jesus Christ—to forgive as we have been forgiven, to forgive and remember them no more as Isaiah said God has forgiven us. That is what God calls us to do—forgive as you have been forgiven, love as you have been loved.

Just think of how then God would use you and me to lift other people out of the depths of where they find themselves in their lives if we forgive from the heart. When we forgive from the heart, think of the affect that has on the other person. When we forgive not only in our words, but walk away and tuck it back under that new file name in the back of the hard drive of our mind, but forgive it and forget it and not bring it up a week, two weeks, a month, a year later, think of the power of Christian love and how that would attract unbelievers and how that would just attract people and draw them to want to hear of Christ because they would see something they don't see all that often in daily life—genuine, unconditional love, lived and practiced.

We who have been lifted out of the depths by God's love and forgiveness have that ability. It is not going to come from within us. It is going to come from the God that we rely on. The more time that we spend with our God, the more that we will be able to set aside what really are petty things compared to what we have done to our God, and we can walk together in Christian love to serve God. When we see what God has done for us, he is feared—not in the sense of being afraid, but feared in the sense of revered. You think of everything that God knows that has been in your heart and he still loved you enough to die for you? If that doesn't create a spark of holy awe within our hearts, then our hearts are dead.

God has always been forgiving and that is why we can always trust in his unfailing love. The Psalmist writes and says, *with you there is forgiveness*. He fully and freely confesses that when he cries out to the Lord from the depths, the Lord hears him, the Lord lifts him up, the Lord washes away his sin and he knows now that he stands at one with God. So did you ever think to yourself, "Why in the world is he saying that he is waiting for something"? Why does he say, *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits; ... My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning*. He is so emphatic about it that he has to repeat *more than watchmen wait for the morning* a second time. What is he waiting for? Especially waiting like a watchmen. In those days if a watchmen—a city wall, a time of war—put yourself in his shoes. Through the night, the darkness of night, the stillness of night, and there is an enemy out there that is threatening you, your loved ones, your family, your home, everything that you have—can you imagine what you would be like going through the night listening? You know

how it is at night. You hear all kinds of sounds, don't you? You wonder to yourself, "What is that creak? What is that snap? What is that? Is that the wind or is that someone out there?" Straining your eyes to see by the starlight and the moonlight if that actually was a figure moving or if that was just a branch in the breeze—can you imagine the sense of relief if they were living in the time of war when the daylight finally came and they could see clearly? Can you imagine that sense of relief and joy that they made it through the night?

The Psalmist says that he waits for the Lord more than that—*more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning*. So once again, what is he waiting for? Look at what he says, *put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption*. He waits for God's unfailing love which will deliver him from this world into the life to come—full redemption. He has been redeemed from his sin and yet the Psalmist knows that as a sinner, he is going to sin again. He is going to walk down the path he doesn't want to. He is not going to serve the Lord fully and completely as he would like. He is going to sin, because although we have been redeemed, we still have the sinful nature that lives in us, and you and I know that. We live with that every day. That is why we get in the depths so often, because we have that sinful nature.

But he puts his hope in the Word of the Lord. He clings to that Word. And he puts his trust in God's unfailing love that the Lord will be with him and sustain him until that day comes when God takes him out of the world. That is what he is waiting for.

Some things have never changed. When Paul says, "Our citizenship is not in heaven. We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness," that wasn't a new idea. The Psalmist in Psalm 130 was saying the same thing. Don't live with your focus only on this world. Recognize that your true home is with God in heaven and now you are on a journey. While you are on the journey of going through this life, there will be ups and downs, but keep yourself focused on God. Keep yourself focused on the truth that your citizenship is with God, and God's unfailing love will sustain you through it all. The same thing Paul said is the same thing our Psalmist says to us this morning.

Some things never change. God has always been loving and God always sustains his people in spite of our unfaithfulness. Our God remains faithful because all of his promises are "yes" in Christ.