



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 9, 2011

Ash Wednesday

Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 7:8-13a](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51a](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 7:8-13a](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 18:9-14](#)

It's Lent, Yet Now We Are Happy

Godly Sorrow Has a Purpose

Godly Sorrow Has Effects

In your mind for a moment picture the happiest day of your life. What was it? The day of your wedding? The day of the birth of one of your children? The day your team won a Super Bowl? I don't know what each of you thought of, but I'm betting not a single one of those days, unless you happened to have a child during Lent, had something to do with Lent, did it? We don't think of Lent as a happy time, do we? It's that time of the year when we sing songs that are in a minor key. They're not as uplifting and happy. I used to get this all the time in Minnesota... "Why can't we sing happier songs during Lent?" Write me a song that says "Happy, happy, happy, we've killed Jesus," and we can sing it. It just doesn't fit.

You come tonight and there is black everywhere up there, right? We don't sing the songs of praise. We drop the Alleluias. We subdue our praise of God during this season. Happy doesn't seem to fit. So you come in and sit down before church. You open up the Bulletin and look at the Sermon theme in case the pastor asks you afterwards what he preached about so you can fake it and say, "I listened." You see it says "Lent, yet, now we are happy," and you think, "What?" It doesn't seem to fit.

It's Easter...now we're happy. That makes sense. But Lent? Lent is about repentance. We have black for mourning over our sins, a little more intense on Ash Wednesday. We have purple during the season. It's the color of repentance. Repentance? Happiness?

As we start this 40-day journey, this 40-day struggle, as we struggle with our spiritual disciplines, as we struggle with ourselves, looking at ourselves honestly and clearly and seeing our own sin, it's probably a good reminder to see the purpose of the whole season because what Paul writes to the Corinthians tonight in explaining why he wrote to them the way he did and the affect it had and how "Yet now I am happy" as he said, it applies to the season of Lent as well, because we know the end of the story. We know what our sins did to Jesus, but we know what Jesus did to our sins. So this is a proper time for us to reflect and remember and be a little sad.

But we know the end of the story, so it's a time yet to be happy because it keeps our whole life in a proper perspective. Without that look at ourselves and that confession and repentance and being assured of our forgiveness, we are going to be in danger of

becoming apathetic, ambivalent toward God, ambivalent toward sin, ambivalent toward life and anything that doesn't make us look better. I think maybe in a sense that's what happened in Corinth.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was pretty sharp. If you read 1 Corinthians, Paul doesn't mince a lot of words when he rebukes them for one of the reasons he was writing to them. They had all kinds of problems, but one of the problems he singled in on was because a guy was sleeping with his father's wife. They were apathetic toward it and ambivalent toward it. Maybe even some of them were saying, "Boy, look at how open and loving we are. Other people would tell this person he's doing something wrong, but we're welcoming him with open arms. Aren't we just more advanced and more sophisticated than all those other people." I don't know what caused them to do it. It could have been any one of those things, but the problem that Paul wrote to them about was because this man was committing a sin that even the pagans would turn away from and say, "Man, that's bad," and they weren't doing anything about it.

So he writes to them and he gets the knife of the Law and he fillets them. He lets them have it. It had its desired effect. He had told them to hand the immoral brother over to Satan so that he might repent, to put him out of the church, to say he is outside of the body of Christ, that he is not connected to Christ anymore. And they did it. And it had the desired result. This man repented. Now Paul had to write them and tell them, "Now, you make sure you assure him that he is forgiven."

So when Paul writes to them and says, "*Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy,*" that's the context in which he says that. He wrote them a letter he knew was going to hurt them. He was not happy as he wrote that letter because these were people he knew, he loved, and he was in many ways their spiritual father that brought Christ to them. He had the joy of seeing their eyes open as they understood that Jesus was the answer to their sin and that God had opened heaven to them. Now he had to do the hard thing and write them a letter that told them, "What you are doing is going to be a danger of separating you from Jesus. Not just this man, but also you." "I did not regret it though I did regret it." He's not contradicting himself. You can kind of understand this, can't you?

As a parent, did you ever have to discipline your child? You know you had to do it, but you knew it was going to make your child suffer, and what parent likes to see their child suffer? You don't want to do it, but you know you have to do it. That's kind of what Paul is describing. "I didn't want to write it, but I knew I had to and I'm sorry that it hurt you, but now I'm happy because I see it accomplished what I was hoping it would. It brought about Godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation."

Godly sorrow has a purpose. That purpose is to lead us to see ourselves for what we are and then to stand in abject horror and see what our sins have done and how they separate us from God and how they are a threat, not just to our comfort and our peace and our freedom from guilt in this world, but they are in danger of separating us from

God for an entire eternity. And to stand and be moved by that and have Godly sorrow that leads to repentance that drives us back to Jesus, to see that he left heaven to become one of us, to do what we couldn't do, to be perfect because God demands that of you and of me. He did it in our place. He took our sins all the way to the cross and he was lifted up just like that bronze snake in the wilderness. Now as we look at him and we believe, that Godly sorrow leads to repentance and leads us to focus on Christ on the cross, not as only our shame of what our sins have done but as the answer to every last one of our sins. We stand forgiven in Christ. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation. It did it for the Corinthians, and by God's grace, God has worked that in our hearts as well.

Now over the season of Lent, we take some time. We maybe reflect more often on how we have failed our God. Sometimes it won't be fun. It's not fun to see how your shortcomings not only have offended God but have hurt the people you love in your life. It's not fun to see that. But if it leads to Godly sorrow instead of excuse making and we flee to the cross of Christ, then we too can say, "I've got Godly sorrow, yet now I am happy because I know I am forgiven."

Godly sorrow not only has this purpose, it also produces powerful effects in our life. It changes us. Did you hear that as Paul described what happened to them when this Godly sorrow seized them in Corinth? What they once were kind of apathetic to or maybe even a little proud of, did you hear what he said? He said, "*See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.*" It changed them. It changed their actions. Once they saw their sin and once they saw their sin taken away in Christ, that led to producing the fruit of repentance...now doing what was right before God. They put out the immoral brother. And now they were being told to welcome him back in and forgive him just as God had forgiven them.

They were doing this, and it moved Paul's heart. Even though it pained Paul to have to write to them the way he did, now he was seeing the benefit of it. I have to believe his heart was just thrilled. He had heard from Titus. Titus came back and gave him the report. You can almost picture Paul hearing him and watching him change from uncertainty of "What is going to happen from this last letter that I sent to them," to "Man, I couldn't have believed that it would have went this well." And God's Spirit did it. It changed these people.

Now they were living in such a way that Paul says, "Here is one of the reasons I wrote like this to you. It wasn't just because of the person that was doing the wrong or the person that was injured by his wrong," this man and this father more than likely, "but for all of you, to see how much you are devoted to us and to your God and to see that put into action in your life. Now that I see that in you and I hear about it from Titus, boy that encourages me," Paul says. "That makes my heart sing. It gives me a greater desire to

serve my God because my God not only has been gracious to me, he's been gracious to you. Yet now I am happy" Paul says. Happiness didn't come without suffering for Paul or the Corinthians.

Sometimes it's going to be that way in our lives. Godly sorrow produces action. It produced action in Paul, right? He did the hard thing. He wrote to them. He put his relationship with them on the line because he was so concerned about their souls. That's a tough thing. That's probably not something that we're always really good at.

Think of how hard it is to talk to a family member about something they are doing wrong before God, or a friend, or a congregation member. Think of how hard it is for us to put ourselves on that line because we're afraid we might lose a friend. That reaction right away probably isn't "Oh, thank you for pointing out my sin." The reaction usually is, "Who are you to tell me? I know all the stuff you've done. You should just shut up." That's not fun. We have to be willing for the sake of that person's soul to endure that and know that Godly sorrow, Lord willing, will produce repentance, but more than likely it isn't going to happen instantly.

Doing the tough thing, being so concerned about our fellow believer that we admonish them and then assure them of forgiveness and then they, and we with them, can see other effects in our life. We talk in Lent, we'll talk about it in a little bit in the Instructions for the Beginning of Lent, Lenten spiritual disciplines, prayer, maybe denying yourself something to remind yourself of how Christ denied himself to take away your sins. I'm not going to tell you that you have to do that, but do I think it can be beneficial in your spiritual life? Sure. Find for yourself what it might be. I don't know what it is. Maybe find some other routine so that you deny yourself some time that you want to spend putting your feet up and doing something else you enjoy. But maybe this time, get a cup of coffee and sit down and pray through the Catechism. One day read over the Commandments, and the next day the section on the Creeds. See what Luther wrote again and then pray about where you have fallen short. Look again at Baptism, at the Lord's Supper, at the Ministry of the Keys and Confession, 40 days in Lent, repeat through the chief parts of the Catechism over and over in those 40 days. Be honest with yourself. See your sins and see where you have fallen short.

After you have fled to the cross and you've been lifted up by God, who loves you so much that he has taken away your sins, then say, "Lord, help me to do better because I want to live for you because you lived for me." It is Lent. I have to see my sin, yet now I am happy because I am forgiven and I have a greater desire to serve a God who loved me that much. That's pretty cool.