



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 11, 2011
12th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Romans 9:1-5](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 56:1, 6-8](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 133-134](#)
Second Lesson: [Romans 11:13-15, 17-24](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 15:21-28](#)

The Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Grafted*

I don't know if 10 years ago the Sunday after 9/11 you folks here used the Service of Word and Sacrament, but if you did, I'm guessing that in the Lord have mercy, the part we skipped over with the baptism this morning, that when the pastor spoke these words, they probably sounded different to your ears. I would guess that on that day, unlike any other day, these words probably jumped off the page at you where the pastor says, "with the steadfast assurance that nothing can separate us from your love and the courage to stand firm against the assaults of Satan and every evil, hear our prayer, O Christ." Those words probably had new meaning at that time if you would have used them because after the tragedy and after all that loss of life and after watching those images over and over and over again, the rest of that week when you gathered together, one of the questions on a lot of people's minds was, where is God? How could God let something like this happen? Such a terrible loss of life...how could people do such a thing?

I know where we were in Minnesota we had a special service that day. I don't like dropping the readings. I love following the readings, but that day we dropped the readings and we talked about what we could be absolutely sure of in a world that was upside down. The one thing we can be absolutely sure of is that nothing can separate us from God's love, and that God enables us to deal with and handle more than we ever think we could.

But when you see tragedies like that, when you see terrible things that happen in the world, one of the things that Satan does is he gets into our head and gets us to start thinking, where is God? If God is a God of love, how could he let terrible things like this happen? He gets us to question that truth...why would God let it happen?

I tell you there is a better why question. There is a better why question that we always do well to ask. It has something to do with why would God do that, but it's not let terrible things happen, it's why would God save terrible people like you and me? You and I are born into this world separated from God. We have nothing to offer God. There is nothing about us that would keep us from doing horrific things. In our sinful nature, we are capable of anything. I don't care if we say "I could never do that" or "I would never do that." Get over yourself. In your sinful nature, you are capable of any horrendous sin. The truth of that is often only found by looking back over our own lives.

Why would God send his own Son into the world to live in our place and die in our place when this is what we are by nature...completely separate and completely lost and without any good in us. That's what Scripture says. Yet, this is what our God does...he loves and he saves.

All week long you've been seeing the images of 9/11 again and the commercials and the shows on TV last night and today. I don't really enjoy them. I don't like having some of those old wounds opened, but I do enjoy hearing again and again that my God loves me, and that will never change, no matter what tragedy happens in this world. That happens because of the Word that we are looking at from Romans today.

As we've been looking at the Book of Romans, we've been reviewing some of the basic doctrines of the Bible. The Word we look at today is *grafted*. That reminds us God is the one who has done the work. In the New Testament church, we are not born into God's people. We are born separated from God, but God, in his love and his mercy, reached out to us with the Gospel and grafted us to the vine that is Jesus Christ. He has connected us to Christ and he's taken away our sins.

That truth that Paul wanted the Romans to focus on is an important truth for us today. In Chapters 9-11, remember we are looking at whether God abandoned the church of Israel. Paul is saying the answer is no, they abandoned God. As he is talking to the Gentiles, who have been grafted into the vine that is God, he's saying don't get too full of yourself. Don't look down on these other people who became arrogant and fell away from God. There is nothing to say that can't be you.

That truth is what he is reminding us of today. He talks about the picture of an olive shoot where he had broken off branches of a wild olive shoot, which would be us by nature, the Gentiles, and you've been grafted onto God's people. God has made you one of his people. He's given you the gift of faith. He's put you onto the root, which is Jesus, and that root supports you. Our God tells us to be careful. Don't be arrogant, but be afraid.

Think about that. Why would we be arrogant? Quite often in congregational life we get things twisted around, don't we? This is one of the dangers as we celebrate our anniversary next year, 150th anniversary, is that we always keep in front of us who is the one who has given the blessings for these 150 years, and we just don't say "God" with our lips but our hearts are too busy patting ourselves on the back or patting our forefathers on the back or patting on the back of people that did this or did that. God did it, he just did it through us, and we humbly ought to acknowledge that truth. He is the one that gave the gift of faith. He's the one that builds up the faith. He's the one that strengthens us.

Arrogance is always not too far away from us. We like to think we aren't arrogant. We know we can't save ourselves. We know that God has done it all, but I think there are ways that you and I certainly become arrogant and think that our God owes us something because we have done this for him.

Whenever we get talking about things in congregational life, a lot of times I hear remarks like “Well, if the other people would just do their part, then things would be better.” That just seems to imply that we are doing something more than they are and then the next danger for your heart and my heart is that God must love us more than he loves those other people because we’re doing more. The truth is that he doesn’t. He loves each of us perfectly because he sent Christ to die for each of us when we could offer nothing to God while we were still his enemies. So be very careful that we don’t become arrogant simply because the Spirit lives in us and he’s doing the work in us and he’s doing the work through us. He deserves the credit, not us.

Arrogance is close to where we live. Our sinful nature loves to be arrogant. Think about how God is saying this to the Gentiles. “Don’t be arrogant because these other people have lost this gift and think now that you’re better.” Who would we be tempted to think we’re better and more deserving of God’s love and grace than? Let’s just assume for discussion sake that someone of Arab descent moves into our neck of the woods here. How loving are we going to be to go reach out to them with the Gospel of Christ? Or are we going to be afraid that they are going to try to destroy our nation’s economy by hurting our cows or something?

If they came here, we wouldn’t kick them out. If they came here and showed up in church, we’d let them in and we’d say “That’s nice. We love you and it’s nice you came here to hear about Jesus.” But would we really go actively out and seek them out and share with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Can you imagine what these last 10 years have been like for someone of Arab descent that is a Christian, not Muslim, but a Christian? Think of how they have been viewed for these last 10 years and then tell me that we’re not arrogant. Tell me that we perfectly love like Christ loves. I’ll tell you and I’ll tell me that we’re lying if we say we do.

There is a part of us that is arrogant and thinks we deserve God’s love more than someone else does, isn’t there? That’s sin. That’s where you live and that’s where I live. That’s how we are. This is what makes God’s love for us in Christ so absolutely amazing. If someone treated us like that, we’d want to get even, wouldn’t we? If someone was arrogant towards us and not loving towards us, we’d want to get back at them. That’s what we do. We are arrogant at times and think we know better than God. We’re arrogant and don’t love others like God loves us. He’s told us “As I have loved you so you must love one another.” Maundy Thursday, doesn’t he say it like 16 times because he knows we’re thickheaded and he has to say it over and over so it gets into our heads? We don’t do it, and God doesn’t say, “You know what? I’m going to get back at them.” Our God loves us and forgives us.

There is the water where he washes away sin, even on a little infant. Isn’t that amazing? Our God, his power and his love for all? His body and his blood, the same body and blood that was given and poured out for us on the cross, he gives to us in, with and under the bread and the wine and says, “I love you. I know you don’t always love me like I love you. I know you don’t always do everything I tell you to do. But I still love you and I’ve taken away your sins.” Isn’t that absolutely amazing? That’s the

kindness of love that he's telling us to live in. The kindness of God, the one constant in our life, when things around us go well or go poorly, when our life comes crashing down around us like those buildings did, with all kinds of different challenges, God's love for us in Christ remains a constant, that kindness. So live in that kindness. Don't let God's sternness come into the picture by turning and focusing more on yourself and turning away from God.

Find time to be in that Word and close to that Word and hearing God tell you "I love you" day after day after day. Who doesn't want to hear that someone else loves them? Who wants to say, "I don't want to hear that. I'd just as soon assume it." I want to hear God tell me he loves me day after day. That's what he does in his Word. That's what he is doing today in his Sacrament. You and I don't deserve it. You and I deserve his sternness, but he tells us you remain in his kindness and his kindness is the one absolute certainty in your life.

I don't know what you did 10 years ago when you got together to worship, but I certainly hope that every day since then, since we saw this tragedy, that you've put your head on your pillow at night and woke up in the morning knowing that God loves you and that will never change. That's living in the kindness of God for we who have been grafted in to the Body of Christ.