



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 16, 2014

Lent 1

Sermon Text: [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 12:1-8](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 121](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 4:5-26](#)

Islands in The Son: An Island for All

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This year during Lent on the Sundays we are looking at Islands in the Son, a refreshment that comes even during this time of repentance, that is the season of Lent. Each Sunday how we focus on how Christ has won the victory and how forgiveness and salvation is ours.

Today we see that this island that we enjoy, this island of refreshment, this island of the Son is an island that is for everyone. It's for all people. We see that real clearly today. Not just those descended from a certain race.

I don't know if you know anyone that went to a south Caribbean island or some place warm this winter, but I'm betting the vast majority of you here didn't. You might know someone that did. And if you did go, you still had to come back, right? You didn't get to stay where it's nice. You had to come back and now enjoy all that beautiful melting, dirty, brown, ugly-looking snow. You didn't get to stay. You're there for a time and you enjoy it and it's great and it's wonderful and it's probably a blast, I would say, but you had to leave it, and other people got to stay.

This is the amazing thing about the love of God in Christ Jesus. Everybody gets to enjoy it, and you don't have to leave. His love is a love that reaches to all people and brings blessings that are far beyond sunshine, warm breezes, and fruity drinks. His love is something that gives you something that no one can take away from you. It's something only you can lose by being indifferent to him. That's what makes this island in the Son just so amazing. It's an island that is for all people, all who are descendants of Abraham by faith, even if they aren't descendants of Abraham by race.

That's what Paul had spent the first three chapters talking about. How Jew (the descendants of Abraham by race) and Gentile are all alike. They are all sinners. They all fall short of the glory of God. They all deserve to spend eternity in hell. He has made that point quite clearly in the first three chapters of the Book of Romans. It's something you and I know. We like to downplay our own sin. But we are really good at picking out the sin of someone else. It's something that we know though. We are sinners. We don't deserve heaven. If we are honest, we know we don't deserve it. Yet Paul makes this great application for us that the descendants of Abraham that will inherit heaven are those that are his descendants by faith.

Even though we have all sinned and we all fall short of the glory of God, we find the exact same thing that Abraham found in this matter. What he is talking about at the start of what I read to you from Romans, he said “What did Abraham find in this matter? Was he justified, or declared not guilty, by the law or by faith?” The promise was given. Abraham believed it. Then he was declared righteous. Then later came the covenant of circumcision, which Abraham was to obey. He had a part in it. But that covenant where he did something, where he performed a work, came after the righteousness that came by faith. So Paul makes the point that probably was shocking to his Jewish readers that Abraham was one with God because of faith, not because of works, not because of who he was, but because of who God was.

This turned the world upside down. They were used to thinking that they were God’s special people because of who they were and how they kept the law of circumcision and the laws Moses had from Sinai. They thought that was why no one could raise an accusation against them because they had done all these works.

Paul reminds them the same thing that Jesus had reminded them. Jesus had come to seek and to save the lost, not those who were full of themselves and thought they didn’t need a Savior. It’s the sick who need a doctor. It’s the spiritually sick, those who understand their spiritual sickness, the sickness of sin, that need a Savior that delivers them from sin. If you are relying on the works of the law, you aren’t looking for a Savior. You’re looking at yourself. In our reading today, Paul tells us this is just foolishness.

Abraham was declared righteous by faith, so he is the father of all those who believe the promise that was given to Abraham, that all nations on earth would be blessed through his descendant. That descendant is Jesus Christ. You and I are blessed by knowing that Christ had taken away our sins through his perfect life and his innocent death. This love that God has extends to all. You and I know that. We’ve heard that. We have head knowledge of that, but do you really understand the depth of what that means? God loves all. He died for all. His forgiveness extends to all. He wants all to have it. It’s received by faith that the Spirit works.

When I used to serve in Minnesota, I would go to the Mayo center quite often, to the Methodist hospital and the other hospitals that were part of the Mayo system in Rochester, to go visit some of my members. When you get in the elevators at the Mayo Clinic, there are people talking all kinds of languages I didn’t know, not just English. As they would be talking, if I would get in the elevator with two women and they would start talking some language I didn’t know and then they would start laughing, what would you assume if you were the other person in the elevator? I’d check my zipper to make sure it was up, discreetly. But you’d assume they are talking about you, right? That’s how we are by nature... suspicious of one another, aren’t we?

When it comes right down to it, we don’t love each other naturally. We mistrust each other naturally. You think they’re thinking or saying something bad about us and you know what? Some of the time, I’m sure we’re right. I’m sure some of the time people are saying and thinking terrible things about us because that’s what sinners do.

Do you ever think about that? If you knew everything that your friends thought or said about you, would they still be your friend? It's something interesting to think about. Then when you stop and realize God knows every last thought, every last word, every last thing you've ever done, and he still loves you, that should just floor you. That should just make you understand that God's love is unlike any other love you've ever experienced in this world or ever will experience in this world.

As Christians, we talk about love all the time. I just don't think we're that good at it. Our love is dependent upon someone else earning our love. We don't always love the people that haven't earned our love, but God does.

Look at Jesus talking to that Samaritan woman at the well. He talks to her about the living water. He reaches out to her in love and wants her to know that he is the Savior, that he is the only answer to her sin. But he also wants her to know her sin, so he says, "Go get your husband." Do you think Jesus was happy that she had all these husbands and the person she was living with now wasn't her husband? No. It pained him. He hates sin. Yet his love was great. His love spoke to her. His love acted. He did the unexpected.

So we see that his love extends to all, even those who don't deserve it. And in reality, that's really a good thing, isn't it? Because if you think you deserve God's love, you're a little too full of yourself. Give yourself a reality check and take a look at the law and see what it says. Then see that you don't deserve a doggone thing from God. You can't lay claim to one beam of sunshine or one drop of water from the hand of your God, and you certainly can't lay claim to forgiveness and eternal life because you're such a wonderful person. Yet your God loves you and has given it to you.

Don't get apathetic to that. Don't become so familiar with that that it doesn't thrill you anymore. If that's where you're at, then just sit down and be honest again and look at God's law and look at yourself, and then run to God's Gospel and see the love he has for you. He tells you that he loves you and has forgiven you. Don't become desensitized to God's love in Christ. It's the most amazing thing in the world.

What's even more incredible is that our God tells us his plan to get this love out to other people is through unlovable people like you and me. He tells us that we are to be his voice to share this with others. We are to be the instruments of his love to love the unlovable. That means at times we just have to get over ourselves and look at our God and the love he has and say, "How can I show Christ-like love to other people?" It's a love that sets other's interests ahead of your own. It's a love that acts, that does, that doesn't just talk a good game but actually gets down to the court and plays. That's what our God calls us to do.

You think "I can't do that." Look at the last verse in our text again. "God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not." That's our God. He called and gave life to the dead. He gave you the gift of faith. He calls into being things that were not. That means he will also give you the strength to serve him in faith and keep you in the faith. It's all about God. It's not about you. That's why this is an island that is a blessing for all people, because God's love is that big. Amen.