



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 30, 2014

Pastor Randy Ott

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Genesis 37:1-11](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 42-43](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:1-10](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 20:17-28](#)

Sermon Text: [Romans 8:1-10](#)

### **Islands in the Sun: An Island Filled With People Ready to Serve**

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

As I said at the start of the service, during Lent we are looking at “Islands in the Sun” because on Sundays, it’s not a part of the time of penitence itself. It’s a time of refreshment where we see what our Savior has done for us, which comforts us during the time of penitence as we see our sins and our need for that Savior.

This morning as we talk about it and as you see the readings that we talk about, you see this tension between selfishness and selflessness that exists in the life of a Christian. As we grow connected more and more to our Savior, we see that we are on an island that is full of people that are ready to serve.

What made me think about this in particular was this past fall, Paula and I went to Branson with two couples from Minnesota. They had a timeshare and we stayed in it with them. Every year though, they also go to a resort in Mexico. It’s not an island (I don’t think) but it’s warm and it’s not here, so it counts for our purposes of what we are talking about when we talk about islands of refreshment and islands in the sun. The one guy that we go with, his name is Mark. He is a guy that can talk to anyone anywhere. He was telling me about how when they go to this resort (and they went to it every year for the last number of years), the people remember him when he gets there. He thinks it’s because whenever they order something to drink or something to eat or they are setting up other things (these people there would help them set up trips to other places around there), they would go the extra mile and would serve him and would be really eager to be there. He said he was convinced it was because they tip fairly well.

The reason that is, like I said he can talk to anyone anywhere, and he would get talking to these people that were waiting on him, and he would ask him what was their yearly income. They would tell him. That’s just the kind of guy he is. Then he was comparing their yearly income to what he was tipping and all of a sudden he could see why they were so eager to serve him because this was making a huge difference for them in their annual income, just what he was tipping them in the two weeks while he was there. That kind of makes sense as to why you would be ready to serve, right? I think we can

understand that. I think we can relate to that. I think if you were in their position, you'd be hanging around Mr. Mark all the time, too, waiting for him to say "Can you get me this" or "Can you help us set up this trip to that" if it's making that huge of a difference in your annual income.

What I just read to you from Romans a little while ago tells us one of the reasons you and I, as Christians, are ready to serve is because of the wealth our Savior has already given us and the incredible difference it makes in our lives. It's an amazing statement that I read to you at the start of Romans 8. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When you remember that Chapter 8 follows on the heels of Chapter 7, it makes sense, right?

If you remember what's in Chapter 7... Paul is talking about the struggle that goes on inside of himself. "The good that I want to do, I do not do. The evil I don't want to do, that I keep on doing. What a wretched man I am! Who is going to save me from this body of death?" During Lent, if we are honest with ourselves and we reflect on what our sins have put our Savior through, that has to be where we end up, right? Who is going to save me from this body of death?

This morning we had a time of silence for self-examination. If you actually examined yourself instead of the person three rows up and maybe a little bit over from you, you probably got to the same place as Paul, right? What a wretched man I am! I have a Savior that has done all this for me and I'm still struggling with this or with that. I'm still really self-centered. I'm still a fool like Joseph, who knows his brother hates him and yet he goes "Hey, listen to this dream I had!" He was just sticking the needle into his brothers, wasn't he? Do you find yourself doing that?

Do you know your spouse's buttons and you push them? Do you know your parents' buttons and you push them? Do you know your kids' buttons and when you've had enough of them, you kind of push them? Do you know how that goes and how we do that at times? What a wretched person I am! Who is going to save me from this body of death? And then comes God... "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Doesn't that just floor you, the wealth he has poured out on you?

What God demands of you, he gives to you. What we couldn't do, we couldn't meet the righteous requirements of the Law because we are sinful humans. We can't do it. He sent Jesus to do it. Jesus met the righteous requirements of the Law. He was perfect in your place. He never pushed those buttons. He loved the other people completely. He was completely selfless and put others' interests ahead of his own at all times, not only in his actions, but also in his words and in his thoughts, because you and I don't do it. God says that is yours. Jesus is your substitute. His perfection is yours. Because of that, there is no condemnation for you.

I don't care if you win Powerball and Mega Millions drawings the next six drawings in a row for each of them, you aren't getting as much wealth as Christ has already given you, are you? You're forgiven. Heaven is open to you. Your God loves you that much.

Now Paul says, "When the Spirit of Christ is living in you, you don't set your heart on the things of the flesh. Now you set your heart on the things of the Spirit." And now you want to serve God. You want to do it, not because you have to, not because he's going to give you something but because of what he has already done for you and what he has already given for you. How do you do it? He says, "Set your mind on the things that are of the Spirit."

What does that mean? It's kind of obvious, isn't it? Did you hear it in our Gospel? What we are talking about today... not being selfish but being selfless. The "Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." You and I don't have to give our lives as a ransom for many. Jesus has already done that. But the serving part, serving one another, isn't that what he is calling us to do?

Think about that... when you think about how we are supposed to serve one another, do you spend more time in your mind thinking about how you could do it? Or do you spend more time thinking about how your spouse or your boss or how your children should be doing this more? Our God is looking at us and telling us to look at ourselves and see how we can serve others more faithfully.

We are going to celebrate Maundy Thursday soon. It's called "Maundy" because of the "new command I give you." Mandatum... mandates. "A new command I give to you. Love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Do you get the idea he is telling us one of the ways he wants us to serve him is by loving one another? And then, if we are confused about what love one another means, he says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." That means we put other people's interests ahead of our own. It's not just all about us. We are not the sun at the center of our solar system. Jesus is. When he tells us to love as he loved, that means we put someone else's interest ahead of our own and we love them and serve them by doing what is best for their interests and not just what we want. Sometimes it even means we set aside our wants and our needs because we just want to love other people as Christ has loved us.

I'll never tell you that's easy. I'll never tell you I'm good at it. And I'll never tell you that any of us will ever be perfect at it. But I will tell you we can get better at it. When we see our Savior forgive us for the times we have failed to do this, it just makes that part of us that loves God all the more want to love others, put their interests ahead of our own and say, how can I help them get closer to Christ? How can I help my fellow believers grow in their faith? How can I help those who don't know Jesus come to know him? What can I do to share Jesus with someone else? Those are the kind of questions we'll start asking, not because we have to, not because we're afraid God will punish us if we don't, but because he's already loved us perfectly. It just turns the whole reason for life upside down, doesn't it? It's not how we are used to thinking about things in any other area of our life, but that's how God is telling us to think about everything in every area of our life. Serve and love as he served us and loved us.

If you're looking for ways to share Christ with others, we have all those videos, stacks of them, over in the commons at our Bible study. We have invitations you can use to invite people to come meet Christ. We've got sheets you can hand them so that when they watch the video, they can think about Christ. Then you can just ask them, what did you think about that? And then you can share your faith in your Savior. That's the privilege we get as Christians.

Leave behind the have to's, start living in the get to's, and start enjoying the love your Savior has already shown to you. Amen.