

God's Grace for Me, My Grace for Myself, Week 3 of "Forgiveness" Series

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 04/22/18
At Crossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

Scripture: Psalm 103: 10-14 & 2 Corinthians 5: 13-19

Psalms 103: 10-14

He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. 12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.

2 Corinthians 5:13-19

If we are crazy, it's for God's sake. If we are rational, it's for your sake. The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised. So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.



There's a man trying to cross the street. As he steps off the curb a car comes screaming around the corner and heads straight for him. The man walks faster, trying to hurry across the street, but the car changes lanes and is still coming at him. So the guy turns around to go back, but the car changes lanes again and is still coming at him. By now, the car is so close and the man so scared that he just freezes and stops in the middle of the road. The car gets real close, then swerves at the last possible moment and screeches to a halt right next him. The driver rolls down the window.

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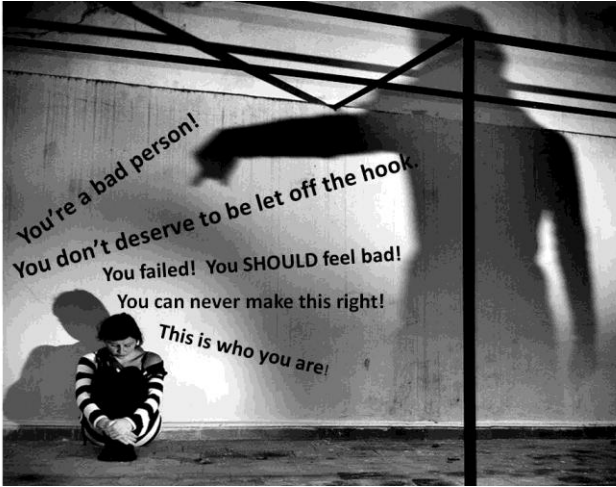


The driver is a squirrel. The squirrel says to the man, "see, it's not as easy as it looks, is it?"



Does this sound familiar to you when trying to forgive yourself for something? Throughout the years, you will hear a lot of sermons on forgiveness. We are told we are supposed to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us. We are told we are supposed to forgive and forget the evils others have perpetrated against us! One sermon that we do not hear a lot deals with another part of forgiveness; forgiving ourselves! I believe one of the most difficult things we can do is to forgive ourselves. We know we have done wrong, someone got hurt, and we want to hang on to the guilt of what we have done because we feel like by hanging on to the guilt, we are somehow paying the price for what we've done, or maybe we can reconcile our actions by carrying around the weight of the offense. Or, maybe we feel that we deserve eternal punishment for the choices we made. Now, that's not to say that we shouldn't feel bad about something or that by accepting god's grace we just say, "Oh, see that was really no big deal." No. It means we acknowledge what we have done, and we ask god for forgiveness. Sometimes that still means paying a penalty... and that's ok. God still forgives us - and we need to accept that gift of forgiveness.

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Satan's sandbox is guilt and shame. He wants you to believe that you are awful and that what Christ did doesn't apply to you. The father of lies whispers in our ears when we are most vulnerable. Carrying guilt with you will not fix anything and will only hurt you. It will not change the past, it will only hurt you. It will not make the past right, it will only hurt you. Is our image of god off? Maybe we feel like god is out to get us, or that he can't possible love us after what we've done. It's just too awful. We are beyond god's grace. When Jesus died, he took the sins of the world with him. He became sin on our behalf. To say that we are too far from god's love or grace is to say that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough.

1 TIMOTHY 2:3

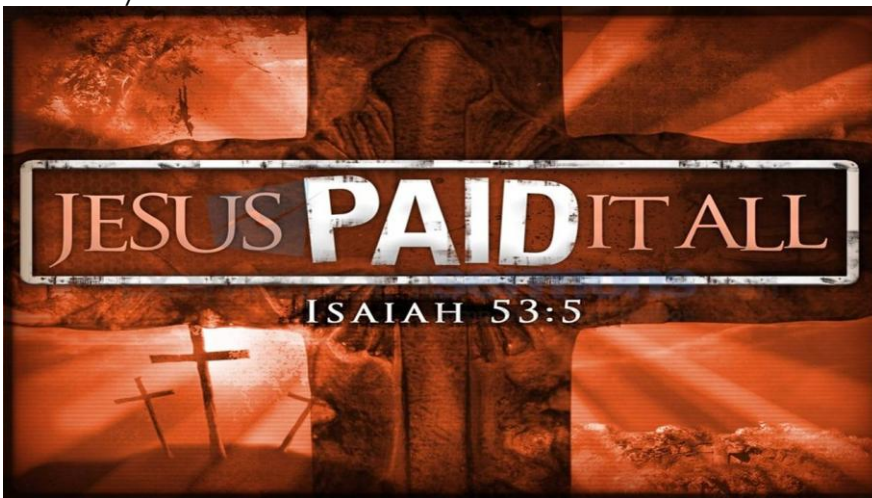
"God our Savior desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

1 Timothy 2:3-4 says, "God our savior desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." When you belong to Jesus, god does not keep record of your sins so that he can extract payment from you in the future. God does not all the sudden come up with a past debt you owe that will keep you out of heaven. Your debt has been paid in full! If you believe in what Jesus did for you, you must believe that the debt no longer lives.

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It's like trying to remove a stain from a shirt when the stain is already gone! We are told that as far as the east is from the west, he has removed our transgressions. The slate is clean! It is not god's goal for you to be miserable. He wants you to be free!



Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of god, which is in Christ Jesus our lord. Do you hear this?"



In July of 2012 I sat in a hospital chapel with a man whose 32 year old son was in the ICU after having a touch of pneumonia. Things escalated quickly and soon he was unconscious in ICU. His son had lived a very wild lifestyle.

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The doctor had told this man that his son had AIDS and was not going to come out of this. His immune system was critically compromised and he was no longer able to breathe on his own. This man worried for his son. That god would not be there for him because of his lifestyle. Together we read psalm 139:7-14

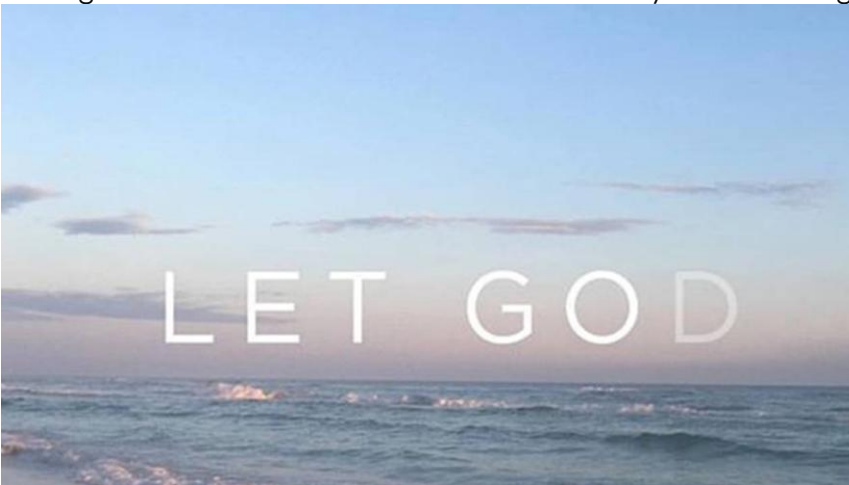
Psalm 139:7-14

Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

In our scripture that Tressie read, we are told that god has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west. How far is that? In Hebrews 10:17, we are told that god has also forgotten our sins! And we want to hold on to them why? Now that doesn't mean keep on sinning, god's got you covered! No. We are to learn and commit that sin no more. But, we are not meant to be shackled by the pain and shame and guilt of that sin.



One year ago, almost to the day, my dad was dealing with losing his home, his freedom, his mind... after he had been in assisted living for a couple of weeks, Ollie moved in. 96 year old WWII soldier. Ollie had just lost his leg in a car accident. He was still getting used to having no leg when he and dad became friends. I got to see a lot of Ollie. One day he told me, you know... I can still feel my toes. Isn't that something? Do we do that to ourselves? When god has removed the stain of sin from us. Why are we feeling phantom guilt?



If you are carrying the guilt of the past with you, today is the day to get rid of it. Today is the day you can finally be free. Are you ready for that? If you are having trouble releasing the guilt of past sins, please pray with me now. And let these words be spoken from your heart...

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Heavenly father, I know that the bible says that I am forgiven by repenting of my sins and turning to Christ. I know that I am saved by grace through faith in the lord Jesus Christ, and yet I find that my thoughts constantly go back to certain sins and misdeeds and I find that I can't accept that I have been fully and unconditionally forgiven by you.. I know that you have said that as far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed my sin from me, and yet I find that my joy in believing is often cut short as I doubt that it cannot possible be true, help me lord to believe what your word says about forgiveness. Give me the grace to truly accept that you have forgiven all my sins unconditionally: past present and future. And that my sins will be remembered no more. Thank you lord that if am forgiven. Thank you father for sending the lord Jesus to pay the price for my sins on the cross - if pray that in his strength if may live my life for him every moment of the day, free from the pain of guilt, as if live joyfully in Jesus' name.

Amen