



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

January 2, 2024

Where Good News is Found

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

"I don't want to do what I'm doing. I want to be better, Mommy." These words were from our 5-year-old when I asked why she had misbehaved one afternoon.

These words remind me of the words of Paul in his letter to the Church in Rome.

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:15; 19).

How human, how real. I find myself coming back to these words again and again throughout life. How many times have I done something or even thought something I shouldn't have? What about you? An unkind thought; a mean word to someone or gossiping behind someone's back; something we do or think and immediately regret. And, what if we don't regret it? Sometimes it just feels good to hold onto anger or bitterness. Or to give into temptation, whatever that may be.

This is something that plagues us all. It's called sin, and it's something we don't really like to talk about in polite conversation, and often not even in the Church. But it's a human condition that affects everyone, no matter who you are.

Sin also affected everyone before us. In Scripture, we see that God gave the Israelites the law, the rules by how they were meant to live. The law wasn't a bad thing. It was meant to be good, because it showed the people how God desired for them to live. But no one, outside of Jesus, was able to keep

the law perfectly. Again and again, just like today, people turned away from God, did not keep God's commands, and turned against one another.

The truth is, we are ALL in need of God's grace. We were and are ALL in need of a Savior. The trouble today is that we often find ourselves feeling so bad for ourselves that we just give into temptation because we assume we're so bad, we've fallen from God's good graces. So, we might as well do as we please.

Or, perhaps more often, we try to check all the boxes to make ourselves feel like there's no way we could do any wrong, and that makes us feel better about ourselves.

As Bible scholar Chad Bird says, "Great danger lurks where people assume: They're so bad that they've out-sinned God's grace OR They're so good that they've out-virtued their need of it."

God's grace is abundant, but we must first realize we need it. As Paul writes, "Wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24). He recognizes the state that he's in as a human being. And, like Paul, we recognize we are captive to sin, and even if we don't directly do something or harm someone, we often do it in our thoughts.

Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount that even a bad thought in our hearts is equivalent to murdering our brother or sister (Matthew 5:21-22). We cannot work our way out of sin. We cannot work our way up the ladder of good deeds, though we do often try.

Where is the good news? Where is the good news for us today, if each of us, if our whole world is captive to sin? If we tend to do what we want, even if it's not what we should be doing?

"Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul asks. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7: 24b-25). We have been saved by Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, the God who loves us so much that he came to earth, to live and die and rise again as one of us, to forever remove the power that sin and death hold over us.

When you find yourself weary from the bad and shocking news of the world or heartache in your own life, it can be so easy to curl up and shut down. Or to just give into the fear and negativity and lose sight of the hope we have in Christ.

We need good news. We are a world in desperate need of God's grace. We are a world in desperate need of "God's peace." The burdens of this life are many -- of bad news, of anxieties and worries, of medical tests and diagnoses, of concern for loved ones, of our fears, of our need to please other people, or our desire to define ourselves by our productivity or popularity. Take ALL those things and lay them upon Jesus.

When you find that you don't understand your own actions or actions of others, remember that sin does not have the final word. Jesus has the final word, and his grace is always enough for us. Who can save us from this wretched state we're in? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Turn to Jesus, and lay your burdens and your struggles upon him, the one in whom grace and good news is found.

As you ponder this message, please listen to this special presentation of [Amazing Grace](#).