



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for March 12, 2023
“Good News: Forgiveness”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: I John 2:1-6

God Provides a Way

A month ago, the alarm on our septic system was going off all the time. That is never a good thing. The sound was deafening. There was even a bright red light that flashed. There was no way to ignore it.

I begrudgingly called the septic people. That’s never the sort of thing you want to spend a lot of money on. After assessing things, they put in a new pump. We have been good to go since. That is, until last week when the electricity went out. We were out four days, and I sweated out every one of them. I so wanted that new pump to work but knew it wouldn’t without power.

Thankfully, everything turned out great.

With all that in mind, I like the story of the church that was installing new baptismal. To their surprise, they were required by the city to install a whole new septic system. At first the pastor was irate. “*Why would you need a septic tank for a baptismal pool?*” he asked. He thought about it a bit more and figured that it was only fitting, particularly given all the sins that would be washed away.

We established it a couple of weeks ago in talking about my brother, Adam. All of us sin just like Adam. There is just no getting around it, or is there? God provides a way.

We read about that today in I John 2:1-6. It a great passage about how God offers forgiveness from the sin that so plagues our lives. Let’s read it now.

1 John 2:1-6

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what God commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

This is God's Word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

An Advocate

It is always good to have someone in your corner. Meredith Burgess was that way with Sylvester Stallone in the movie, *Rocky*. Burgess played the part of Rocky's manager, Mickey. In his own way, Mickey was always there for Rocky. He always came to his defense.

Mickey was the one who told Rocky in the heat of battle, "*Rock, your nose is broken.*"

"*How's it look?*" asked Rocky.

"*Ah, it's an improvement.*"

As I said, it's always good to have someone in your corner.

Jesus is that way with us. He comes to our defense. He paves the way for reconciliation. He opens the door of forgiveness. He is our Savior.

John writes in I John so we will not sin. That's his intent. But if we do, and we will sin, he is quick to turn our attention to the one who is "*an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the righteous.*" In this context, an advocate is one who:

- Helps
- Advises
- Counsels
- And defends.

The notion of an advocate puts us to thinking about what goes on in a courtroom.

I served on a jury last May. It was a pretty intense case with a lot of ramifications for our community. The defendant was represented by counsel. I thought his lawyer did an incredible job. There wasn't a lot of histrionics like you see on TV. He was simply there for his client to make a solid defense.

On more than a few occasions, his lawyer approached the bench to plead his case before the judge. On many of those occasions the judge acquiesced. The defendant would have been lost without proper defense.

Jesus is our defense. He is our advocate. The sacrifice he made on the cross paved the way for that to happen. You see, in God's court, the defender must be without sin and Jesus was just that.

When it comes to sin, God's righteousness demands that sin is dealt with. His love, though, provides a way for that to happen. Enter Jesus, our advocate who pleads our case. Jesus suffered death on the cross so we might be forgiven.

Forgiveness

You have heard it said, “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” You better believe it!

In God’s eye’s, forgiveness is not done, willy-nilly. It comes at great cost. It comes with a price. God doesn’t just pretend as if our sins didn’t happen. He doesn’t sweep them under the rug. He sends Jesus, and at the center of that is the cross.

God knows exactly what we need. We need forgiveness. No wonder the cross stands as the central symbol of our faith. It is the very thing that brings salvation.

We read it a couple of weeks ago, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.”* (Romans 3:23-25)

We will talk about justification next week and redemption a couple of weeks after that. Today though we consider atonement.

When it comes to understanding atonement, the notion of atonement as *at-one-ment* has been helpful. The sacrifice of atonement is much like that of the unblemished lamb at Yom Kippur which was offered for the sins of the people.

We become at-one with God on account of what Jesus did on the cross. It brings us together with a righteous, yet loving God. The cross is the very thing that paves for you and me to be forgiven, and at once reconciled with our Heavenly Father. The cross reminds us that forgiveness is not so much a matter of what we do, but what God does.

- Our part involves confession as Ashlee talked about last week.
- Our part involves repentance as Steven talked about on Ash Wednesday.
- Our part involves a response of faith that awakens us to God’s grace, which I talked about two weeks ago. .
- God’s part is so much more. It involves Christ’s death on the cross and the greatest show of love the world has ever known.

My good friend, Howard Olds once wrote, *“While the cost of our sin is more than we can pay, the gift of God is more than we can imagine.”*

- It was that way for the paralytic who was lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus was preaching. The man was not only healed of his paralysis, but his sins were forgiven.
- It was that way for the woman caught in adultery. She was forgiven and told to go and sin no more.
- It was that way for Zacchaeus, the tax collector upon whose house salvation had come.
- It was even that way for Peter who denied the Lord three times. Upon meeting the resurrected Lord, Peter was forgiven when the Lord asked him three separate times if he loved him.

The list of those forgiven is long and includes you and me.

Years ago, Ernest Hemingway wrote a book called, *Capital of the World*. In it, he told a story of a father and his son who were estranged. The boy's name was Paco. He had run away from home and found himself on the streets of Madrid hoping to become a bullfighter.

His dad desperately wanted to reunite. He knew there would be little chance in finding him by simply wandering the streets of Madrid. Eventually, he put an ad in the local newspaper which read, "*Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa.*"

Eight hundred young men, all named Paco, showed up that day.

The need for forgiveness is that pervasive and is the very reason God sent Jesus into the life of the world. Through Christ, God paved the way so that you and me and all the Paco's of this world who find themselves estranged from him can be forgiven.

God never turns anybody away who, as it says in Psalm 51:17 comes with "*a broken and contrite heart.*" Thank God forgiveness is ours in Jesus Christ.

Living Like Jesus Did

At first glance it would seem as you read the beginning verses of I John 2 that John abruptly shifts gears. That happens between verses 2 and 3. Instead of talking about forgiveness John launches into a discussion about keeping God's commands.

I don't see that so much as an abrupt shift as it is a natural flow from one thing to the other, the flow of forgiveness to obedience.

John writes, "*Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what God commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys God's word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in God: Whoever claims to live in God must live as Jesus did.*" (I John 2:4-6)

Upon being forgiven we are set free to live as God wanted us to live, not just forgiven, but free—free to obey, free become more and more like Jesus.

You remember the bracelets from a few years back, *What Would Jesus Do?* They were all the craze. They gave those of those who are Christ-followers pause to consider what we need to be doing. Those four letters have been more than instructive in my life. How about you?

Let's turn that just a bit. Instead of WWJD, how about LLJD, *Living Like Jesus Did?* That's the way it is for those who are forgiven and free. They are free to live like Jesus did.