

“The Grace of Jesus Christ”
1 Peter 3:18-22
***The Confession of 1967* 9.08**
Sermon #90
Lent 1
50th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
2.21.21

1 Peter 3:18-22 CEB

18 Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. 19 And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. 20 In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water. 21 Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at God’s right

side. Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

The Confession of 1967 9.08

In Jesus of Nazareth true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them he took upon himself the judgment under which all men stand convicted. God raised him

from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all men.

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As we continue our journey through Lent, the scriptures, and C67, allow me to remind you of some important details as we continue. Lent is the season in which we dissect the reconciling ministry of our LORD, Jesus Christ. Through his life, death, and resurrection, we have been reconciled to God. As we look at his earthly ministry through the scriptures, we can see that Jesus' life was not only about the hereafter, but the here and now. Yes, reconciliation to

God is ultimately important. Also as important is reconciliation to each other right now. If we as disciples of Christ are entrusted with the message of reconciliation found in the life of Jesus, what does that look like in Pollocksville and the surrounding area? If we, as disciples of Christ place our trust in him who defeated the powers that continue to threaten to divide us, how do we live as a reconciled people in a society that values brokenness?

As we continue to trace the life of our Savior and C67 through this season, we will continue to discover that reconciliation is not a one time event. It is a continuous act that takes work. And sifting through C67 during this season, how does the church operate as God's Ambassadors of Reconciliation in the world?

And as we've read today from 1 Peter and C67, there is one connecting thread that is worth pointing out. In 1 Peter 3:18 it says:

Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit.

Likewise, in 9.08 of C67, it says:

In giving of himself freely for them he took upon himself the judgment under which all men stand convicted...The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all men.

One way to look at this could be: "Well, God can't stand to look at us because we're so horrible. So, someone needs to take the blame."

Yeah, we're broken. I'm not disputing that. But digging deeper into Christ's work of reconciliation, there is another part of the Divine Love Story between God and humanity. Freely giving of himself for us who are not capable of filling in the chasm that separates us from God and from each other, Christ Jesus died and was made alive again by the Spirit so that we would be in God's presence.

Possibly for many of us, it's easy to focus on what is usually read into the work of Jesus Christ: Dying for a bunch of awful people because God can't stand to look at us and needs to punish someone for it. I certainly grew up with that interpretation. My guess, though, is enough people feel pretty awful anyway about themselves. Hiding from the truth or maybe not knowing the truth that they are God's own children in need of a Savior but believe that they are worthless and beyond help. Maybe they've been worn

down by expectations of a job, or society for that matter, that doesn't honor their humanity by expecting them to work 80 hours a week at minimum wage not even bringing home \$600 a week.

Then, they must find another full-time job just to make sure they can buy medicine and groceries. That's not to mention any children they have. Maybe some of these people have been told they were useless for years because of parental or spousal abuse. Maybe some of these people carry guilt from something they did or didn't do years ago and they seek alcohol or drugs to make them feel good. Maybe it's people who feel suicide is the only option left.

Before I go on, I will be talking about an article on teen suicide during the pandemic. If this is a trigger for you, I want to give you a heads up so you will be able to do what you must do, even if that is to step outside or scroll to the bottom of page 11 of this sermon.

On January 7th, eighteen-year-old Dylan Buckner had taken his life.¹ He was an exceptional student and football player with offers at various schools to play. Places where this young man thrived had been closed due to COVID: Classrooms, football field, clubs, and the school newspaper. All of that taken away and reduced to Zoom. While limiting or even reducing the opportunities for mass gatherings has been crucial in the fight against COVID, the void of normal social interaction has taken a toll on so many people.

Dylan was online that day for his classes. And after 3:00 PM, he was gone. It wasn't because he wanted to take a risk or that he simply wanted to die. Dylan had an intense emotional pain that wouldn't go away.

¹<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/their-teen-killed-himself-now-they-want-save-others-struggling-n1256732>

About six months prior to this tragic day in Dylan's family, he opened up to his parents that he was down. Everything had been taken away from him that fed his soul. And at a time when people are trying to discover themselves separately from their parents, being isolated with one's parents or guardians for months on end worsens the depression.

Dylan's parents did the right thing. They got him in with a psychiatrist, medicine, and in-patient treatment as his depression got worse before it appeared to get better. Eventually, things seemed to be managed exponentially better than before.

But, as Dylan's father, Chris Buckner says in the NBC News article:

“Had Covid not happened, or our country’s response to Covid been better, I think Dylan would still be here,” Chris said. “Covid’s not just killing people by the disease. It’s killing people by depression and suicide, and God knows what else.”²

COVID is a layer on top of other layers. But for Dylan and many others before COVID and in this moment, there is no shame in reaching out for help. Dylan’s parents now find themselves trying to speak out to help remove the stigma. His dad, Chris, says that depression and thoughts of suicide are nothing to be ashamed of. It’s like having a physical illness that you would need to tell your parents or doctor about. You don’t get better until you say something to someone who can help you.

² ibid.

I suppose, as several in the article suggest, that if Dylan had been able to be around trusted friends or adults at school, this situation would look different. But, the stigma is there and the Buckners and others who have faced similar tragedies are telling others that they are not alone. There is hope. There is a better way. There are people who can help them. There are ways to work through this and there is absolutely no shame. They do not have to bear the burden alone.

Isn't that what Grace is? Not bearing the burden alone. Actually, we ultimately don't bear the burden as Christ has done that already. There is Grace for Dylan's parents. There is Grace upon Grace upon Grace upon Grace for Dylan. There is Grace for those who grieve after a loved one has committed suicide. There is Grace for the ones who lost hope and had no way to ease their pain except suicide. There is Grace for those who feel they are at wit's end

while trying to manage two or three full-time jobs in order to take care of their families. There is Grace for those who have been fed the lie of worthlessness by abusive ones close to them. There is Grace upon Grace upon Grace upon Grace for all of us when it seems like the powers of sin have the final say.

As God's Ambassadors of Reconciliation who claim and trust in Christ Jesus as the One who defeated the powers of sin through his life, death, and resurrection, who are the people we are being led to in 2021? Who are the same type of people Jesus hung out with who were ignored by society around us? Who are the people who feel so broken they believe there is no other option?

Reconciliation takes many forms. Let us be mindful of the hurt and pain that surrounds us. And may we be in constant prayer for the

Holy Spirit to empower us to continue to be Ambassadors of Reconciliation for our hurting world.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.