

“Restored: Finding Redemption in Our Mess---Bless this Mess

Romans 3:23-24

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Rev. Dave Baldridge

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

Here we are 4 weeks from Easter. We continue our Lenten series, “Restored: Finding Redemption in Our Mess.” As a sermon resource I’m using the book by the same title (Abingdon, 2016) by Tom Berlin, a United Methodist Pastor in Virginia. Today’s title, “Bless this Mess.”

But you see the purpose of each local United Methodist Church is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. For the world to be transformed---we have to be transformed. So, we have 2 questions today:

Bless This Mess Questions

1. What/Who has the power to change us?

2. Do we want to change?

So, what does transformation look like. Author Richard Foster says this, “...it is entirely possible for a person to be physically alive while spiritually dead. But the salvation that is in Jesus Christ immerses us into the hidden reservoir of divine love and power, bring into our lives God’s life and forming us into communities of Jesus disciples.” (Berlin’s book, page 56)

I don’t want to be physically alive and spiritually dead. Do you? XXXX So what does it mean to be spiritually alive? What does it mean to be spiritually transformed? Foster goes on and says, “that God is not seeking to improve us, but to transform us---to sow us who he really created us to be.” Our goal is to be transformed. **(image---butterfly drivers license when he was a caterpillar)** Transformation should be a spiritual progression that we make. To be change, different than our messy selves.

Now for this guy that likes routine and schedule---change is difficult. In our spiritual life. In our life that is messed with sin we may not want to change because we are comfortable with familiarity. Therefore, we are okay with the sin we are committing and are not willing to change. We are more comfortable with that than a life changing act of God’s power to transform us.

The goal of a follower of Jesus is not a few changes along the way, stopping this particular habit or this specific pattern, but it is a journey of a lifetime.

Berlin tells the story of going into a man’s office and that his desk was very messy. **(image)** Now the interesting thing was there was sign that was over the man’s desk **(image)** that said, “Bless this mess.” The man said, “I used to pray that I would be more organized until I saw that sign. Now I pray that God will just bless my mess.” Berlin in his book says, “I don’t know if God was blessing his mess, but as I took in the piles of junk on his desk, floor filling cabinets, end tables, and chairs, I saw that he was giving the Lord plenty of opportunity.” (page 57)

We see signs all over that say, “Bless this Mess.” Why there are T-shirts, coffee mugs that have the slogan. There is even a new TV show, I’m not exactly sure what it’s about, but is coming out in April and the title of the show is “Bless this Mess.” I think sometimes we quit trying to change or be transformed and say, “Oh, well, bless this mess.” That’s just the way I am. I’m not going to change. Friends it is a cop out. When we say Bless this Mess are we asking God to ignore the mess or are we asking God to fix the mess?

Real change requires power that we don’t have on our own. We need God’s help. We need God’s power. Rev. Berlin says, “Sins puncture our character, bruise our integrity, damage our beauty, compromise our relationships, and harm our well-being.” There must be a willingness to change. And yet we are sooo stubborn to admit we are wrong and to change.

A married couple had a fight and gave each other the silent treatment. Both refused to talk, extend forgiveness, or offer a compromise. A week into their noiseless argument, the man realized he needed his wife’s help. He was not an early riser, but he had to get up at 4 a.m. to catch a flight for a business meeting. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, the man wrote on a piece of paper, “Please make sure I’m up at 4 a.m.”

The next morning, the man woke up only to discover that his wife was already out of bed. It was 8 a.m., and his flight had long since departed. He was about to find his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. He read the note from his wife. It said, “It’s 4 a.m. Wake up.”

Oh, we don’t want to confess it is our fault, we would rather be stubborn. Both were unwilling to change to make the first move. Friends, I’m happy to say that God has already made the first move.

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Notice the word ALL. No one is exempt. All means...well it means ALL. All have sinned.

Some church people were going to change the church sign out front. One said, “I have a great idea. Let’s have the church marquis say, “No sinners allowed.” The other person said, “That should pack them in on Sunday.” No, afraid not. Sign need to be changed to Loving God, loving all. All have sinned. All sinners are welcome. **(image) Church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.**

There are a couple of stores where I get reward points. I like them. I wish they would just give them to me free. The catch with reward points is the more you buy, or if a motel---the more you stay...the more rewards points you get. That’s great. Eventually if you buy enough you will get a free item, or a discount, or a free nights stay.

I have good news. Jesus is not in the Rewards business. He is in the Grace business. It’s not how much to do, Grace is free. Free for the asking!!!!

In our theology we believe that God continues to seek us. You may remember in this series we have used Michelangelo's painting The Creation of Adam (**image**) God reaching out to us. All initiative begins with God. God seeks after us. We believe that God's grace is in our lives before we are even aware of it. (Grace at Infant Baptism) We call it Prevenient Grace. Grace that comes before we are even aware of God's pursuit.

John Stott famous theologian puts it this way: "My faith is due to Jesus Christ himself, who pursued me relentlessly even when I was running away from him in order to go my own way. And if it were not for the gracious pursuit of the hound of heaven I would today be on the scrap-heap of wasted and discarded lives."

– Roger Steer, Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott (IVP Books, 2009), pp. 262-263;

The hound of heaven pursuing you. Chasing you. Wanting you.

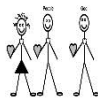
Just as ALL have sinned let's look at verse 24: ²⁴**and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** Who is justified? ALL. By rewards program...no...freely...how---by His grace. Ah, Restored finding redemption in our mess. Redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

Just as we believe in Prevenient Grace, we also believe that what comes next is Justifying Grace. Saving Grace. Saving us from ALL our sins. "Justification," said John Wesley, "is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins, and ... our acceptance with God." Justifying grace is the assurance of forgiveness that comes from repentance, from turning toward God's gracious gift of new life. It is being reconciled and realigned with God and the acceptance of God's atoning act in Jesus Christ. (from UMC website)

Oh, but to be found we must first see that we are lost. Justifying grace opens our eyes to our condition.

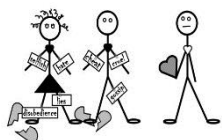
There is a classic illustration about Justifying Grace/Saving Grace called "The Bridge." It has been used by many. As an intergenerational church I have found it illustrated by Teresa Kalssen with stick figures for children.

All matter to God. (**image**)

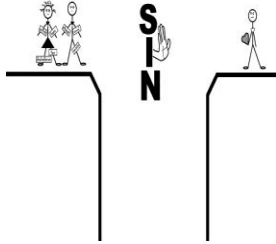


God made us and loves us. Look at the smile on God's face. He made you and it was VERY good. God has shared his love (as shown by the heart) with all people.

(**image**) Through free will and choice they threw away His love and did whatever they wanted.

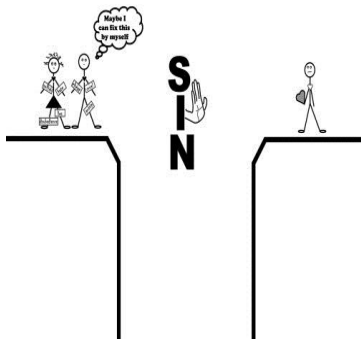


Disobedience, lies, selfishness, hate, gossip, being cruel and hateful. That sin got between us and God. It separated us from God. **(image)**

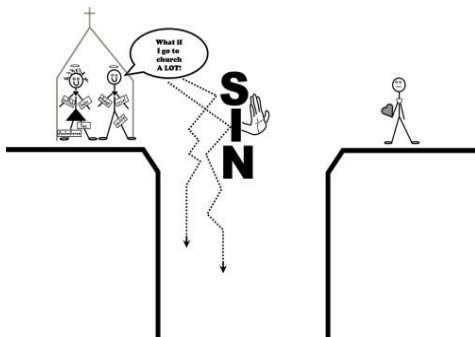


We can't be together...ever. The great divide.

However, being who we are and saying "Bless this Mess," we think we can fix the problems by ourselves. **(image)**

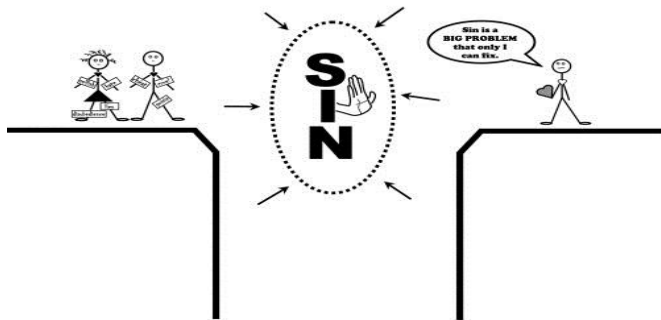


So, we try to get out of the mess by ourselves. For example, we try to be really really good. **(image)**

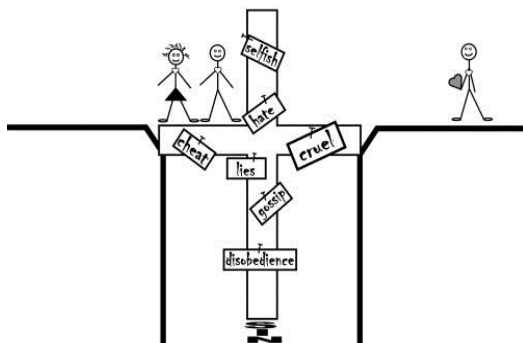


Why, we even go to church. If I go to church my sins will be fixed. That's not the way it works.

It doesn't matter what we do. Unless we do it with Jesus it is nothing. Only Jesus can "fix it." Only Jesus can get us out of this mess. **(image)** He is the only one who can Restore and Redeem.

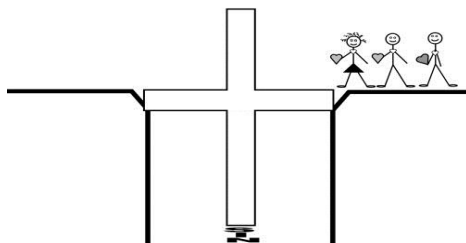


“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:23-24 **(image)**



The cross is the bridge. Through his death on the cross just as we are we come to Jesus with all of our ugliness, sin, and mess. Through His death on the cross sin was “squashed.” We are now on the road with Jesus. The cross becomes like a bridge that we can walk across and can now become close to Him.

(image)



Redeemed. Restored!!!!

Another way of putting it is like John Wesley said that Prevenient Grace is the porch in front of the house. God has invited us into the house, but we haven’t yet accepted the invitation. Justifying grace is like the door of the house. We respond to God’s invitation and open the door... and through Him are made righteous; we are justified.

I know people who are in a recovery program. One is Alcoholics Anonymous. Notice in their restoration 2 of the 12 steps. Steps #4, and 5.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS 12-STEPS

- 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
- 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

In the restoration and redemption of our soul we must search and take a fearless inventory of ourselves. We must confess...to God and to ourselves that we have sinned. The power of confession is that it requires us to examine all aspects of our life.

Justifying grace calls us to confession. It is then that we realize that God is doing for you what cannot be done for ourselves. We began our message with 2 questions:

Bless This Mess Questions

- 1. What/Who has the power to change us?**
- 2. Do we want to change?**

Perhaps even from an intellectual assent we can answer question 1. We do not have the power to change ourselves. So, I ask Who has the power to change us? XXXXX

But here is the major question. A personal, rhetorical question. Do we want to change? If we do want to change there must be the confession of our sin and the acceptance of the free gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

Grace. Grace. Just as we are. With our mess we can still be redeemed and restored.

A friend, Rev. Jorge Acevdeo has been long term pastor at Grace United Methodist Church in Cape Coral. Fitting with the name of His church...Grace...I found this image on His website. (image)



From Prevenient Grace. Even there. To--Even now. Saving Grace, Justifying Grace and Even more grace as we travel through a discipleship journey (sanctifying grace) and Even When.... our days are over there is grace.

God doesn't want to bless our mess. He wants to get us out of the mess. To fix it. To clean it up. To do that we must respond. He's ready if you are. Don't bless this mess, say, Yes, I confess.