

JUNE 14

“God shows his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”, Romans 5:8.

Friends, you can spend the rest of your life meditating on this sentence from the readings for today. God, whose name in Hebrew is translated, “I am that I am”, the One who brings into existence whatever exists, this One “shows” his love. “Demonstrates”, is what we should understand here, not show in the sense of “let me give you a look at this picture on the wall”. And even more, we can add in God “proves, reveals, acts on, undertakes” his love for us.

God demonstrates his love for us. Us, not special wonderful me alone; not magnificent solitary you by yourself; but us together; the whole sad lot, motley crew, hee-haw gang of us in the human family. All of us. And, strange—unreasonable, unfair even—as it may seem, all means ALL. And it means each of us individually, particularly.

Now if you look again at the name of God—the One who brings into existence whatever exists—consider this: the love God shows has power in it. Again, what God loves/does is an action. The who and what that is Jesus Christ, he died for us, and that act has outcomes, results, consequences, purposes, and so on.

The crucifixion was not an idea, the death of Christ was not a dramatic gesture nor was it the defeat of a visionary proposal that didn’t take root. God did something that had results, took hold—a new thing—and what God did was a gift, not a transaction. Not a loan nor a payment for services rendered or an advance on account of what we have agreed to do.

Why did this wonderful demonstration/transforming event happen? Because God said it shall be so, and the death of Christ for us happens while, during, despite, in the course of, as we continue to be, as we persist in being sinners.

Why then and not earlier or later or maybe never? The best answer I know comes from another deliverance story. God sends Moses to Pharaoh, as recounted in Exodus 3:7. God says God has heard and seen. More than

that we are not told. But the fact of it happening when it happens is as solid as rock.

God has heard and seen our bondage to the cruel mastery of sin as it is in us and in our world. This takes some hard prayer and thought to deal with. Sin drives us, motivates us, cripples us, deprives us, separates us from the fulness of life in God's creation. This truth does NOT mean we never do good, selfless things or think kindly and charitably or never know peace and enjoyment. We do experience these things, but those times are moments of grace and good fortune that we cannot command and perhaps do not allow ourselves to enjoy fully out of habit and fear. And we cannot liberate ourselves from ourselves. We are stuck in whatever coping and accommodating we can do—if we are lucky—or left suffering and struggling depending on our circumstances.

So what shall we do with this, about this? It is the kind of statement we have to respond to, an idea we have to deal with. As the saying goes, it's a bell you cannot unring.

Perhaps the best modern presentation of Paul's great declaration is in a sermon preached by another Paul—Paul Tillich, a mid-20th century preacher and theologian—whose landmark sermon, "You are accepted" (available on the internet by title or in the sermon collection, *Shaking the Foundations*) is startlingly appropriate for this time in our national life as well as for each of us in every day of living.

But our very awareness of our sad, broken selves is the voice of God telling us both how badly off we really are and what liberating possibility is before us. Tillich says the "voice" which gives us both the bad news and the invitation out of the mire is the source, the origin, the very ground of our being—the That which brings into existence what exists. We cannot escape knowing the separation, the broken reality of ourselves, but God does not abandon us in this realization. Tillich (in good Protestant theology form) speaks of God making possible a transformation of ourselves through "grace"—that holy power which enables us to do the thing which will set us free—and what happens is that we realize, accept, recognize that we are accepted.

Accept that you are accepted. You can't earn it, you don't deserve it, you might look at the possibility of it and say "No thanks" to it, preferring to stay

and be as you are rather than venture forth, but it is there. Always. From before you were born. You are accepted. Sweet Jesus in the morning, just as you are, here and now, always.

Now let it be said that being accepted is a constant reality, but not a static one. That is, God accepts us as we are but won't leave us there. But that's another note.