



FROM THE PASTOR

Psalm 51: 1-12

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

The Bible tells God's story through the story of the men and women with whom God has interacted, spanning thousands of years. Therefore, the Bible is not just about God's story, but about humanity's story as well. This is so important, because if the eternal perfection of heaven and sublime perfection of God's creation were sufficient for God's purpose, the Bible wouldn't even be necessary. But these were not sufficient for the God of love. At the end of a perfect creation, God made human beings. Human beings were not required for God's perfection, but because of God's love. God wanted human beings in order to relate to—not just rule over—creation.

To be able to relate to God without the ability to turn away from God means that the creature is not free, but is under compunction to love God. God wants our love to be freely given, not compelled. So, God gave us free will. The gift to choose freely requires the ability to choose wrong. Human beings did. The result is called sin, and sin destroys any hope of being able to relate to God within the confines of God's created order. God's created order is clearly presented in the Bible. It may be called the Law. To freely relate to God in a creation fractured by sin, we require more than Law. We require God's loving mercy. We call this, Gospel. When David wrote Psalm 51, he was keenly aware of how far he was from the perfection of God's law.

He had a new wife, acquired not only because of lust, but at the price of murder. He knew how far he was from God's good purpose in creating human beings. David says, "**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.**" What David needed was not another chance, but another heart. David says: "**Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**"



Like David, we need that same new heart. What distinguishes Christians from non-Christians is not a lack of sin, but an acknowledgement of sin. What distinguishes Christians from non-Christians is not that we are perfect, but that we know we have no hope apart from the only Human being who ever was perfect. Those who would disparage our faith will always find stones of Christian imperfection to throw at us. We have no stones of Christian perfection to throw back, but we do have Jesus. Jesus who has the stones of perfection to throw back and who calls us to Him in love beyond our comprehension. ***"Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."***

In Christ's service,
Pastor Brian Shirey

Post Scripts:

- † Our lessons for this Sunday, August 23, the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, are:
 - First Reading: Jeremiah 15: 15-21
 - Psalm 26
 - Second Reading: Romans 12: 9-21
 - GOSPEL: Matthew 16: 21-28

- † At St. Luke's we continue to struggle with the effects of COVID-19, but God has provided for our needs and we are not only coping we are thriving. I am thankful to God for the good things He provides us in our need. Often, when I am tempted to be discouraged, I think of how well God has equipped us to cope with this particular challenge. I do have deep concerns, however for schools, students, teachers and support staff. We are all frustrated because we don't really know the best thing to do from day to day or even moment to moment. Nowhere is this more the case than with schools. I'm sure there are some who might let self-serving purposes direct their thinking. But I'm sure that almost everybody involved in the back-to-school debate wants what is best and safest for students and those around them. I hope we soon come to know what is best, but until we do, let's keep our schools, students, teachers and support staff in our prayers.