

Rescued, Reconciled and Restored
Romans 6: 1-11

As most of us know all too well, life is a journey of tall mountains and deep valleys, smooth sailing and treacherous seas, blessings and trials, happiness, and heartache. There will be times when we will need help and times when we can be of great help to others. Either way, God has provided us with every gift of grace we will need to navigate and persevere. One of those gifts is the Scriptures, and if we are to have life and have it more abundantly as Jesus puts in in John 10:10, we will need to unwrap that gift and put it into use. It is my hope and prayer that the time we spend together in God's word here at Millcreek will begin with Bible study and end with us taking home some practical things we can use as we walk together with Jesus.

Last week, we spent some time dealing with a question that can arise even among the most faithful Christians from time to time. How do we know God loves us? That is an important question that demands nothing but a truthful answer, especially when we are going through a difficult trial and having doubts about God's love. That question is not one that is unique to you and me. Our doubts are much like our sins, and as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes there are no new ones under the sun. When we have doubts, isn't it good to know we are not the only ones that suffer from them?

Doubts are overcome by truth, and the answer to the question about God's love, the truth- is found in Romans 5:8 where Paul tells us that God shows his love for us in that while we still were still sinners, Christ died for us. The crucifixion and death of Jesus on the cross is proof positive that God loves us. Even when we are going through a difficult trial and thinking to ourselves that God must not love us, God is saying I love them even though they are thinking those things. God in His grace also offers us what we need to overcome those thoughts and allow our faith to grow. God does not leave us to wonder or wander alone. Deut 31:8 1 Peter 5:7 Hebrews 4:16 Rev 3:10

God wants us to be the very best we can be.

Because God loves us, He offers to rescue us from our sins.

Psalm 71-20-21 David believed that to be true and so should we. Even though our sins are great, God's love and mercy and love are greater.

Because God loves us, He has a plan to reconcile us to Himself.

One of the core beliefs or fundamentals of Christianity is that Jesus died for our sins to reconcile us to God. The other religions of the world teach that reconciliation with God comes by good behavior. The problem with good behavior is that it will never be good enough to satisfy God's requirement for righteousness and holiness. God is righteous and holy and all that is in His presence must be righteous and holy.

When it comes to good behavior or good works as we sometimes say, God demands an A+, and since God is all knowing He knew that even the best behaved and most obedient among us would never earn more than a B-, even on the best of days. God is also perfectly just, which means He will not require something from us that we are incapable of doing. There must be another way and there is. John 14:16

God's plan to reconcile and restore us to Him was in place even before the beginning of creation. Ephesians 1:3-5. His plan was to pour out His wrath on His Son Jesus, instead of sinners such as you and me. It was finished around 30AD when Jesus said yes, and willingly shed His blood and died on a cross at a hill called Calvary just outside of Jerusalem. It is a truly holy and divine plan that goes far beyond human knowledge and understanding.

What we can know and understand is that our reconciliation with God happens when we accept His free gift of grace and place our faith in His Son Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are individually rescued from sin and the penalty that comes from it. Jesus redeems us by His shed blood, and we become part the body of Christ, a holy community of other believers that have been rescued and redeemed. Reconciliation to God is both personal and communal.

Because God loves us, He will restore us to the person we were designed and created to be. That means we will become perfectly righteous and holy instead of rebellious and sinful. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are reconciled, or rescued and redeemed, but not yet restored. Restoration is a process where God takes us from where we are to where we need to be. There is a lot of work involved, and the good news for us is that we aren't the ones doing the restoring. As we saw last week, we are being restored to something holy and special, the glory of God. I thank Susie for that reminder last week that old rusty cars can look brand new again. We are not an inanimate old rusty car or a fallen down house but living breathing people created in the image of God, which means we are also intimately involved in the process of restoration. Some cooperation is required on our end, and the conundrum is that we will have to die before we can be restored.

All of that brings us to chapter 6 of Romans. Paul describes it this way in Romans 6:1-11 He is not talking about death and funerals where we physically leave this world behind but dying to sin where we leave our old inner self and the ways of the world behind. It is a much different kind of death. As Paul reminds us in verse 6 the old self is crucified, dead and gone and we are indeed freed to live as a new creation in Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, the reality is that we are saying to God we want to become one with Him. Just as some people today choose to identify as someone or something else, redeemed people have chosen to identify with Jesus. When He was crucified, we were crucified with Him. When He died, we died with Him. When He arose from the dead, we arose with Him. When he ascended into heaven, we ascended with Him. We are alive and living in Him.

Rescued and reconciled people have a new self, a new nature, but the problem is that we still have an old unrestored body that will need some work. The good thing is that when it comes to God restoring His people, there are no lost causes. God never loses interest or runs out of money. God always finishes what He starts. However, God is not going to do all the work Himself. We are mistaken if we believe we don't have to do anything but sit around and wait for a new paint job and the engine to get rebuilt. One of the things the apostle Paul was accused of was encouraging people to sin so that more of God's grace would be seen. 3:8 He addresses that false assumption in no uncertain terms in 6:1-2. **God's grace is a gift, not a given!**

The bad news is that restoration can be expensive, and it requires a lot of work. The good news is that Jesus has already paid for it. It was purchased with His blood. There is much work to be done before the new paint job goes on, and God is asking us to help Him do some of it ourselves. Restoration is a group effort that includes us individually and as the body of Christ along with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are alive in Christ (Romans 1:8), and because we live with Christ right here and now on earth and will live with Him in glory later, there are some things we must do (or must not do) ourselves. (Romans 1:12-14). God will show us what and how. Until our restoration is complete, we will still struggle with sin. The good news is that it no longer rules over us. Jesus does. Let us be moved closer and closer to His glory every day. Amen