

Isaiah 53:1-6
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

World Communion Sunday
Midway Presbyterian Church
October 2, 2022

This Is For You

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Our Old Testament lesson today is taken from Isaiah 53, which foreshadows the suffering of our Lord for us. Even though innocent of wrong, the Suffering Servant will surrender to God's will and take the consequences of the sins of the community upon himself. Listen these words from Isaiah 53:1-6...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

Our Epistle Lesson is taken from 1 Corinthians 11. Here Paul is addressing a problem regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper in the church in Corinth. Apparently, there were divisions of status. When the church gathered for its communal meal, some who had greater resources would go ahead and eat their own meal without waiting for others. Some would go hungry. The Corinthians had forgotten what the death of Jesus was like and what it meant for them. So Paul reminds them of the tradition he had taught them about Jesus' last meal with his disciples. Listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26...

Sermon

Sunday is surely the Lord's Day—the day of Resurrection—but it is also *our* day, because on this day we are reminded of God's gifts for us, those fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And all the more so on this Communion Sunday when we gather at the Lord's Table to receive his gifts of bread and cup. The table is prepared, laden with elegant, yet simple gifts, symbolic of Christ's body and blood, given for you.

Today I want to focus on the easily unnoticed phrase in our Epistle Lesson: “for you.”

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he said,

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
(I Cor. 11:24b)

For just a moment let’s think about our **names**. God, who knows all things, even the number of hairs on our head, knows our names, knows our hopes, knows our hurts. Think about your name, then think about this: God so loves *you*—Alan, Dicky, Randi, and all the rest of us—God so loves you that he gave his only begotten Son—*for you*. The body of Christ was broken *for you*. The blood of Christ was shed *for you*.

The dictionary has several pages on this preposition “for.” One definition suggests “in defense or in support of, as opposed to against.” To affirm that God is for us is to affirm that he is against everything which is against us. If God is for us, then he will take his stand by our side—in our defense and support. The God of the Bible is not a neutral God. In some religions you may find an indifferent, detached god, one who does his work and withdraws to a safe distance of non-interference. But not the God of the Bible—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul’s words in Romans 8:

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (vv. 31b-32)

God is forever working for good in the lives of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28) God works over, under, around, and through all things *for us*—for our good.

In Jeremiah 29 the prophet conveys this word of God:

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (29:11)

What are some of these things that can be seen to be against us? Well, quite a few: sickness, sorrow, trials, and temptation; tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, peril, sword. But if *God is for us*, that more than overcomes what is against us.

God doesn't promise us health, but he promises to sustain us in sickness or in health, to be with us and for us, come what may. As we know, health can be influenced by a number of things: heredity, luck, diet and exercise, stress medical care. But it is not the promise of God; love and care in the face of sickness is God's promise to us. In the midst of our darkest night when we cry out, "Where is God?" he is there. God is the light that shines in the darkness, the strength made perfect in our weakness. We may feel his presence. But whether or not, he is *with us and for us*.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
(Psalm 23:4-5)

On one occasion in his comic strip "Peanuts," Charles Schultz had Charlie Brown trying to talk Linus out of his security blanket. "Linus, let me help you find a substitute for your blanket." Trying to think of some way to break the dependence and still meet the need, Charlie Brown says, "Maybe I could find you a dish towel or something." To which Linus replies, "Would you give a starving dog a rubber bone?"

But Schultz is being biblical, following Jesus' thought about God:

"Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Mt. 11:9-11)

In our Old Testament lesson (Isa. 53:1-6) the prophet deals with the question of how the tragic pattern of sin and punishment could be broken and replaced by the wholeness that accompanies the embrace of God's compassion and righteousness. Thereby does the Innocent Servant of the Lord take upon himself our transgressions, our iniquities. He will become the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29b) Obedience to the Lord leads the Servant to place no limits on self-giving love. (Paul Hanson, *Interpretation: Isaiah 40-66*, pp. 156-157)

Listen to these familiar words of Isaac Watts' lovely hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross":

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

And from our Old Testament Lesson:

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:4-6)

That is what we are called to remember when we celebrate The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (I Cor. 11:26) It's not just the preacher who proclaims the message. As you partake of the bread and the cup. As you remember our Lord Jesus, *you* proclaim his death, until he comes again.

So, it was not for nothing that Christ died. It was *for us, for our* sakes, for *our salvation*. We are the very intended recipients of his grace, the guests invited to his table.

That God's gifts are for you personally, does not mean that they are for you alone; they are for all. The "Good news of great joy" is for all. For some it seems there is little room in their lives for others. But God has plenty of room in his heaven and on his earth for all of us. In fact, God has a special room designed for each of us. Ora Mae Poore is now there, in that house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1)

In an often-quoted sermon, renowned Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich spoke of grace—the initiating, surprising love of God, in this way:

Sometimes...a wave of light breaks into your darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, "You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know now. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. simply accept that fact that you are accepted.

Tillich wrote the sermon, "You Are Accepted," on his sixtieth birthday. And across the top of the first page of the original manuscript were these words, "for myself." Preachers need reminding, too. The Word of God is for us also. The broken body of our Lord, the blood of the new covenant poured out for all of us.

My friends, God is *for* you and me, and his gifts are for you and me. Even you sinners, yea, all of us sinners. "All we like sheep have gone astray." While we were yet sinners standing in the need of prayer, Jesus said,

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20)

So to his Table we come, not because we're worthy, but because we're invited. And we're invited not because we deserve to be, but because the God of grace, made known in Christ Jesus our Lord, loves and cares for us.

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