

Sermon – September 11, 2022  
“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill us with open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Good morning. It is good to be back and worship with you in the house of the Lord on this beautiful Sabbath morning. I would like to thank everyone who helped with the service last week and give special thanks to Kevin Mooers for sharing the message. Kay and I greatly appreciate being able to spend some time with our family and the opportunity to get to know our grandchildren just a little better. As we look forward to worship next week, let me remind everyone that next Sunday is the last Sunday of summer and as such, we will be wearing Hawaiian attire. So, dig out those Hawaiian shirts, dresses, or any brightly colored clothing, and let's say goodbye to the hot, muggy days of summer and hello to the coming, cooler days of fall.

Speaking of a change of seasons, we have arrived at the last season of the Christian calendar, Kingdomtide. Since the day of Pentecost in June, we have focused on the coming of Holy Spirit and have sought to open our hearts to the presence and action of Holy Spirit in our lives and to receive and exercise the gifts and fruit that come with fresh fillings and encounters with Jesus through the presence of Holy Spirit in our lives. Let me encourage us to continue to

pray for Holy Spirit to enkindle the fire of Jesus' love in our hearts and to be open to any manifestations that come with such openness. But now we turn the corner and enter into a new season, Kingdomtide. This may not be a familiar season for us as it has not received much emphasis since the early 1970s in the United Methodist Church. Kingdomtide is the season in which we focus on the arrival on earth and in heaven of the Kingdom of God and Christ's reign in heaven and earth. Yes, on earth. This is a kingdom that is, but is not yet. It is a kingdom that is breaking in more fully as the hearts of believers become open to salvation through Jesus Christ and they are transformed into citizens who are growing into the image of Jesus. The end of this season is Christ the King Sunday on November 20<sup>th</sup> and it is followed by the season of Advent. Christ the King Sunday will mark the end of the cycle for the Christian year, and we may gather once again early on the first Sunday of Advent to watch the sunrise and celebrate the beginning of another year, another cycle of the seasons of the Church. I don't think that we will find displays in Wal-Mart and other places celebrating Kingdomtide, but it is a season for us to focus on being those who are citizens of the Kingdom of God, right here, right now. Throughout this season, we will be looking at scripture from Paul's letters that address life in this in breaking kingdom.

This morning's scripture comes from a letter from Paul to Timothy. This letter differs from the other letters of Paul we have as it is not written to a church or churches, but to a person, in this case Timothy. As we hear Paul's letter read, we are allowed to enter into a personal communication written with love and concern for a fellow worker in the Kingdom of God. Timothy is one with whom Paul has a personal relationship and interest as Paul is the one who disciplined Timothy in a life with Christ. Timothy is also leading a church in Ephesus, where we may recall false teachers were also at work seeking to lead the members of the church away from Paul's Gospel and into false teaching that required the keeping of the entire Law or Torah in order to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

With this background, let's look at how Paul views his relationship with Jesus and how he tells Timothy and us to live Christ-centered lives. Notice Paul is grateful to our Lord, and the source of Paul's gratefulness is not abundant physical blessings but comes because Paul has been judged by Jesus as worthy to be appointed to service in the Kingdom of God. Paul is very aware of the seriousness and failings of his past sinful life. Paul describes that past as one in which he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. The sins Paul speaks to are known to us

because of the descriptions of his actions found in the book of Acts. Blasphemy is the use of God's name in a careless manner. Here it may also refer to Paul's unwillingness to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and so his actions were against God. Paul also sees his past actions against believers whom he had beaten, placed in chains, and sent to prisons as sinful. Paul now clearly sees his former life as an affront to Jesus. Recall that Paul was a Pharisee and describes himself elsewhere as blameless according to the Law but sets that claim aside in his letter to Timothy.

Paul speaks here to his past actions as having received mercy because at the time he acted ignorantly in unbelief. John Wesley, in his comments on this verse, speaks to Paul's actions in ignorance as, "...but because [he] did it in ignorance. Not that his ignorance took away his sin; but it left him capable of mercy; which he would hardly have been, had he acted thus contrary to his own conviction."<sup>1</sup> Wesley holds that our actions in ignorance do not take away our sins, but open us to receive mercy.

Paul also understood not only that his past placed him among sinners, and he claims to be first among sinners, but Paul also understood that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul has come to belief in Jesus, knowing that Jesus died for his sin and he is saved or redeemed, and reconciled to God. Paul understood that because of his belief in Jesus' actions on the cross, the grace of Jesus has overflowed for him with the result that faith and love that are in Christ Jesus are now growing in his heart. If we are following along in our Bibles, these words in verse 14, "the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus," are words that we should underline, write in our notes, or write on our bulletin to remind us of the outcome of belief in Jesus. These words will occur many times in Paul's letters to Timothy and are a key theme found in Paul's personal letters.

What Paul has shared in this opening chapter of the first letter to Timothy is the salvation message according to Paul. Paul understood his past as a sinner. He is so convicted of his sin that he claims that he is foremost among sinners. Paul also understands that the reason Christ Jesus came into the world was to save sinners and that Jesus accomplished his purpose by shedding his blood and dying on the cross. It is through Jesus' actions that Paul was saved. What Paul could not do for himself, Jesus Christ accomplished. The mercy and grace Paul speak to constitute an unbelievable act of love that Paul understood he did not deserve. Jesus' purpose, to save sinners, is the reason Paul has been extended mercy. Jesus Christ has displayed the utmost patience in

Paul's life and through that patience, allowed Paul to become an example to all who would come to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life.

Paul also realizes that his response to this unknowable gift of mercy is the overflowing of faith and love that are in Jesus Christ. Paul's faith is seen as an upward response to God, and love becomes the outward overflowing love for neighbor. Paul's response to such love does not begin in addressing justice issues in the Roman world, as large as they might be, but in sharing this salvation message with those who are not believers in Jesus Christ. Paul's response to the faith and love that he has found in Christ is to lead others to Christ.

Our response to the Good News is to be the same. We need to come to this same understanding, that we are sinners and that Jesus has and continues to extend to us the utmost patience, waiting for us to believe that Jesus died for our sins and that through his love, we are also saved. If we are sitting in the church or at home this morning thinking that because we were baptized as a child and have lived a pretty good life so we must be heaven bound, let me share with you that unless we have the marks of a follower of Christ, faith and love, then we need to stop whatever we are doing and come to belief in Jesus. That means if we are sitting here this morning and wondering if we are saved then we need to act, to get up out of our seat, come forward and confess that we are a sinner and now we believe that Jesus shed his blood and died for us on the cross that we might be reconciled to God. If we are sitting here this morning and wondering if we are saved, thinking that because we know about Jesus, we are good, but don't know him as our savior, then get up, step into the aisle, come forward to the altar, surrender our doubts, believe Jesus died for forgiveness of our sins, and accept mercy and grace from Jesus. Don't wait, don't hesitate any longer. Surrender your life to Jesus and come and believe.

If we have all made that confession and accepted Jesus as our savior, then we should be leading lives that bear the marks of a disciple of Jesus Christ, faith and love. These are the marks of one saved by Jesus that Paul shares with Timothy. We may not be called like Paul to start churches throughout Asia, but we are to be those who have faith in God and love for our neighbors. We are also to be those who are saved and in response are filled with joy and are actively sharing the Good News with others who do not know the Good News that there is a path from a life of sin to abundant life in Christ. That is the fundamental love response for a Christian. We, as believers in Christ, are to be those who are making disciples, each and every one of us.

Several years ago, I watched the movie “Hacksaw Ridge,” the story of Army Pfc. Desmond T. Doss, a medic who rescued 75 of his wounded comrades. Now this is not a movie that I recommend that we watch, but there is a scene in the movie that has stuck in my head ever since I watched the movie. In this scene, Desmond prays, “Jesus, let me get one more. Let me get one more.” I don’t think that I have ever heard a better prayer for how we should be seeking to live out our own love response to being saved. We should be those whose lives reflect this idea of seeking the lost and sharing Jesus Christ with them, of discipling them and helping them to grow in faith and love until this prayer becomes their own response to the mercy and grace Jesus has extended to them. We are to be those who are listening for our neighbor’s cry for Jesus, going to them, sharing the Gospel with them in word and deed, walking with them, loving them, sharing with them until they also come to belief in Jesus and in response begin to pray this same prayer and live out this same love of neighbor also praying, “Let me get one more. Lord, let me get one more.” And as they pray that prayer, we also pray again, “Lord, let me get one more. Let me get one more.” and with the guidance of Holy Spirit, we again listen for the cry of another sinner and when we hear their cry, we willingly go to them and start this same outpouring of love into their life. This is Paul’s idea of the marks of a Christian, faith and love lived out in the in breaking Kingdom of God.

Don’t miss the idea of the Lord’s patience that Paul speaks to here. There may be some among us that have such a gift for sharing the Gospel that they can find a lost soul and disciple them to become a new believer quickly, maybe even in an hour’s time. But for most, we will need patient endurance and a pure heart to walk with another until they are saved and then we go and find another and finish life strong, bearing the marks of a Christian. We are to be followers of Christ and make our life’s goal to bring those to whom we are led to by Holy Spirit to walk with into the Kingdom of God. None are beyond the reach of Jesus. He has paid the price for everyone. We have a better savior than any of us are sinners. Even Paul who claimed himself the foremost among sinners came into this life with Christ.

As we contemplate such marks of a Christian and wonder if we could be used by Jesus to disciple another, we begin to have questions. What do we tell someone? Do we need training? Our response is to be like Paul and begin by learning to tell our story of how we met Jesus. If we don’t have a story to tell, then let me invite us again this morning to get up out of your seat now, today, before we end our time of worship, come to the altar, meet Jesus Christ, accept him as our

Lord and Savior. Then go in faith and love and tell everyone our story of how we finally understood that we are sinners and that Jesus died on the cross that we might receive mercy and grace in order that we might be reconciled to the living God. Then go and start telling those we are led to by Holy Spirit our story of how we got up out of the pew we were sitting in on this day, stepped out into the aisle, walked down the aisle to the altar, accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and entered the Kingdom of God for all eternity. And how in faith and love we have come to patiently walk with them so that they can come to faith and love in Christ and go and share their own story of how they gave their life to Jesus and then went out in faith and love in Jesus to help another find their way to faith and love in Christ.

*Pray with me: Lord Jesus, bring us to faith and love in you. Lord, let us each be led to one more lost sinner whom we will walk with in love and disciple until they too have faith and love in you. We pray this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Wesley, John. John Wesley: The Complete Commentary on The Bible. Kindle Edition, Loc 46683.