

## **“We Are Forgiven”**

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

The first week in January, Danette and I were vacationing on North Reddington Beach, just north of St. Petersburg. A large group of over 50 college students were staying in place next to us the first 3 nights we were there. As we watched them play football and volleyball games on the beach, we observed that they were well-behaved, well-off white kids having a good time together.

I walked up to a group of them and asked where they were from. One of the young women asked me if I knew where Lexington, KY was. I said that I went to college in Danville, KY., so I know where Lexington is. Their mouths dropped open, clearly surprised.

The same young woman asked, “You graduated from Centre?” I responded, “In 1981”. She smiled and exclaimed, “We’re the Centre swim team that came down here for training.” That led to a long group conversation of them asking me questions about what Centre College was like 45 years ago and me responding with several stories. Danette took our picture and I got to remembering.

When I remember my 4 years at Centre, like some of you remembering your 4 years after high school, there are things we did that we need forgiveness for. In my case, I’m proud of the academics part of it, but not at all proud of my 3 years living a fraternity house and playing on a football team in which alcohol and drugs were the norm. After talking with today’s Centre students, I thank God that is no longer the norm.

As we age, we tend to look back on our lives to thank God for the blessings and to ask God for forgiveness for what we did wrong.

When on that same beach, I was reading a book Stan Difford gifted me with entitled “The Guy With the Sign” by Terry Pluto. It is a book of stories, many of them taken from his faith columns in the Sunday Plain Dealer. Terry entitled one of his stories, “God may have forgiven her, but she still can’t forgive herself”.

“I keep looking back at my life and wondering what I did wrong.”

Kay (not her real name) mentioned that to me.

She had been telling me about her recent health issues, a trip to the hospital when Crohn’s disease acted up. She also had other internal problems.

She has dealt with these problems for decades.

“When I was younger, I slept with married guys,” she said. “A long time ago, I did some cocaine.”

Her voice trailed off.

It’s been many years since she slept with married guys. It was a long time ago when she used drugs.

But sometimes when we’re under physical and emotional stress, we circle back to what we did wrong years ago.

So much of life is a spiritual battle.

It’s why a broken heart seems to take so much longer to heal than a broken arm or leg.

I began to talk to Kay about forgiveness. She believes in God. On one level, she believes God has forgiven her. But she finds it hard to forgive herself.

One of my favorite Bible verses is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here.”

I mentioned that to her.

She DID those things . . . past tense.

She is NOT those things today. God is not punishing her through her health problems.

We talked quite a while about that . . . who she was vs. who she is today.

And she had changed . . . for the better.

I believe we have a spiritual enemy. The Bible calls it Satan.

Isn't it easy to turn a two-minute conversation into a two-hour reality show in our heads?

We go over . . .

And over . . .

And over . . .

The same stuff, and often it's just stupid stuff. Or it's stuff we can't fix . . . like missing a chance at a last conversation.

There are times when I stop and pray, "Lord, I'm getting stuck on stupid . . . I need you to free me."

Sometimes I hear, "Get off yourself and go to work."

That can be anything from my job to working out to calling or visiting someone.

There are people who don't want to hear about spiritual battles or anything that hints at the biblical view of Satan.

But there are so many reasons people who are stuck begin to self-medicate. We can do it with everything from alcohol to drugs to pornography to gambling to obsessively watching certain shows for hours at a time.

We sense we are in battle, and we want relief. But we don't want to face the real enemy.

A person can pray alone. A person can also reach out to someone to pray together.

At church, some people stick around after the service to pray . . . but probably not as many as should, given the battles we face.

When someone tells you about a problem, say, “Let’s pray about it right now.”

The prayer can be quick and quiet, especially in a public place. But do it.

One of the most dangerous ways to stay stuck is to never tell anyone about it.

Obviously, you need to be careful about some subjects.

But Kay opening up about her health issues and doubts led to a discussion and a quick prayer that did bring her some relief.

It’s also why the proper type of counseling can help. I also think the Catholic sacrament of confession is very valuable to some people.

We all get stuck on something, sometimes.

Now we need to know we can’t always face it alone.

I thank Terry Pluto for his wisdom about forgiveness.

After listening to the story of my encounter with Centre students and the memories that brought back and after listening to Terry’s story about the woman having a hard time forgiving herself – maybe some old memories came back to you. But they are just that – old memories.

Today we are a new creation saved by God’s grace through our faith in Christ. Listen again to St. Paul’s words in our text from Ephesians 2:1-10 . . . <sup>1</sup>You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires

of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

As we continue the journey through this season of Lent to the Good Friday cross, our sins are forgiven each day. We are created anew each day along the way. We are Divinity Lutheran Church loving and forgiving one another as God in Christ loves and forgives each of us.

May the peace of God . . .

#779 – Amazing Grace