

Sermon Reading: Romans 5:6-11

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Sermon Theme: Rejoice! God Chooses to Have a Relationship with You

It's strange and even a little awkward when someone asks you, "Why are you friends with that person?" Maybe you haven't had to answer that since you were in high school. But you may remember being put on the spot to give a reason why you chose to have a relationship with someone. Sometimes we flip the thought around and it's a chance at some self-reflection where we wonder why someone would want a relationship with me. Think about your relationship with God. Why would God want a relationship with you?

We want to believe that we are strong people. But it's not just about being physically strong or healthy. We want to be mentally strong so that we can make the right decisions. We want to be emotionally strong so that we can weather life's storms. We want to be morally strong doing what is "right" and "good" by other people. We want to be strong in our relationships so that other people can depend on us when they need help. And, to a point, we pride ourselves in our strength especially in our relationships. We know how we want to have friends and relationships with people who will build us up and complement our strengths. We want people in our lives who bring out the best of us. We don't want to be in a relationship where someone asks too much of us. You don't want to tie yourself to someone who pulls you down.

The problem is, for as strong as we want to be, we also know how weak we are. You feel it when you aren't sure this is the right or best decision. You know how powerless and helpless it feels when you don't have the answer. We know how weak we can be with our emotions when someone pushes the wrong button—it's not just the two-year-old who throws impressive fits. You know how you have not always been morally strong. Too easily do we choose to do what is easy and is comfortable instead of what is right. Even when we know there's nothing wrong with it—we hate to admit that we need someone else's help because it makes us feel weak. But we also know how much

we need that help. And so, why would God want a relationship with me who is so weak?

But at least you try your best, right? You've heard it and I've heard it. It's engrained into our very American way of thinking. *“Do what is right in everyone's sight, be a hard worker, put in your time, do your best, and good things will happen for you. Even suffer, deal with life's problems without making too much of a fit, and eventually good will come your way.”*

But in order for that mindset to really work, you can't be too hard on yourself. You need to be able to justify your actions when they come into question. You need to have enough reasons for why you did what you did or didn't do—including sinful actions. So we set different sins on different levels. We recognize, “Yes, I did not get my work done like I said I would, but I didn't lie about it.” We convince ourselves that different good deeds should outweigh the bad. If I didn't listen to my spouse yesterday, I will be sure to take out the garbage without her asking today and that should make things right. Like a figure skater effortlessly twirling and gliding along the ice, we dance and twirl around the truth that we did something wrong and sinned. And you know why you do. You can almost see the wall go up after you lost your patience and said that hurtful thing to your child. You can almost watch the gap spread when you fail to keep a promise to your friend. You can almost see how crushing it is to someone when you don't really listen to them. You know how your sin ruins your relationships.

It does that and more with our relationship to God. Isaiah writes, **“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear”** (Isaiah 59:2). When we sin against someone else, it's not just the other who is hurt. Your sin is never done in a vacuum where it only affects you. David writes in Psalm 51, **“Against you [Lord], you only; have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight”** (Psalm 51:4). You want a relationship with God? The Lord who says, “Be holy as I am holy.” You sin is against the one who warns that he will not leave the guilty unpunished. In fact, the Lord hates all who do wrong (Psalm 5:5).

Sin ruins your relationship with God. But what we can fail to appreciate and understand is that relationship was already broken from the time your life began at conception. You were God's enemy. You hated him actively fighting and rebelling against him. You wanted nothing to do with him. That can be hard to imagine when you see that cute baby. It can be hard to believe when you see that upstanding law-abiding citizen. We want to believe that there's a little good in everybody. But you see glimpse of that hostility when someone cheats on their spouse. You see that hostility when a Christian couple knows God's will when it comes to marriage, but they choose to live according to the way of the world. You feel that fighting in yourself when you know what God

wants you to do, but you decide that today you just don't care. You are going to do what you want.

Why would God want a relationship with me? It can't be because I'm strong when it's so evident I am not. It can't be because I'm a good person because God hates all that I have done wrong. It can't be because I wanted that relationship when by nature I am his enemy.

So why me? Paul says in v.6-8, **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** It's a possibility, but it's very rare that someone will die for what society would call a good person. But that's not what God does. He who is true God dies for the godless and ungodly. The sinless gives his life for the sinful. He who is the Life, dies for those doomed to death. At just the right time, Christ died for us. Make no mistake. There was nothing that drew us to him. It wasn't because there was something that we could offer or bring to the table. When we should have been, and by all accounts we were, unlovable, God goes into action. When we were still powerless—weak, hopeless, and helpless on our own—God demonstrates his own love for us. While we were still sinners—objects of wrath and disappointments—Christ dies for us.

Unlike the billions upon billions of deaths before and after this one, Jesus' death does something. By his blood that he sheds on that cross, you are justified. That means in God's courtroom he declares you not guilty of sin. Satan can accuse you all he wants; sin already has been paid in full. You might feel differently at times and think, “But what about this sin that I did and keep struggling against?” Jesus declares you justified—not guilty of sin. You have been washed in the blood of the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

“But what about not leaving the guilty unpunished? What about God hating all those who do wrong?” While we were God's enemies, nailed to the cross and hanging between heaven and earth, Jesus places himself between you and God the Father. Jesus takes your sins with him on that cross so God crushes Jesus with his hatred for sin. Jesus claims the sins of the world to be his own so God pours out his anger and hatred punishing his own Son. Jesus shields you from God's wrath and anger so all that's left for you is peace with God. There is nothing left to punish. That perfect life was exactly what was needed. The blood Jesus sheds is the exact price to be paid. All is well between you and the Father because through the death of his Son, you have been reconciled. You are no longer God's enemy. With his death Jesus kicks down the barrier of sin that separated you from God. He bridges the gap of sin that once was there to

make you at one with the Father. Jesus tells you, “Yes, you were helpless. So I came to carry the weight of the Law for you. You were hopelessly lost. So I came to show you I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Yes, your sin was great. But I am greater. It is finished. I died so that you might live. I plucked you out of the pit of certain doom and suffering in hell, reconciled you—fixed that broken relationship—with God through my death, and saved you.”

Because Jesus justifies—declares you to be not guilty of sin—because Jesus reconciles you with God—you are no longer God’s enemy—how much more shall we be saved through his life! There is nothing left to get in the way for you. Jesus even sends his own Spirit to work saving faith in your heart so that this forgiveness of sins and eternal life is already yours. All the validation that you need for your relationship with God rests on the work, life, death, and resurrection of your Savior Jesus. Rejoice because in Jesus this is most certainly true. God promised it to you already at your baptism. Rejoice because you were brought to the baptismal font an enemy of God and you went back marked as his own dear child. Rejoice because this same Jesus does not leave you alone. He continues to work through his Word and the Sacrament to draw you close to him. Rejoice living sin-free and guilt-free because that is what Jesus declares you to be as you serve God and those other relationships in your life. We want to do this because while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us. You are no longer helpless, hopeless, God’s enemies. By Jesus’ blood your sins are forgiven, eternal life is yours, and through faith God chooses to have a relationship with you. Rejoice! Amen.