

**Weekend of Sunday, June 24, 2018**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 12/Proper 7/Year B**  
**Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13**  
**Sermon Title: “Now is the Day of Salvation”**

**Theme**

*Paul and his fellow workers experience great hardships and even rejection while carrying out their missionary work. Nevertheless, Paul continuously proclaims that God has not rejected us but is graciously working for our salvation.*

**Text**

<sup>1</sup>As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup>For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup>We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup>but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup>beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup>by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup>truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup>in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup>as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup>as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

<sup>11</sup>We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you.

<sup>12</sup>There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. <sup>13</sup>In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

## Sermon

Today is the last installment of the short four-part sermon series based on the Second Readings from Second Corinthians. Point of clarification: the Second Readings for the next two weekends are also for Second Corinthians but next weekend I will not be here in the pulpit. I will be in Houston at the National Youth Gathering. You will want to make sure you are here next weekend though because the Rev. Dr. Robert Duffett will be here and I know you know he always does a great job when he is home at Zion.

Over the last month I have been telling you about the Apostle Paul. You know that Paul as Saul was an energetic and zealous persecutor of the Christians before his own conversion. And you also know that God saw fit to use those same spiritual gifts of high energy and zealousness that God himself gave Saul then Paul to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today we regard Paul as a Saint of the church, but make no mistake about it, even as Saint Paul, he was a sinner.

But being a sinner doesn't exclude one from also being a saint. Centuries later, Martin Luther, the founder of our faith tradition wrote,

For as long as I live in the flesh, sin is truly in me. But because I am covered under the shadow of Christ's wings, as is the chicken under the wing of the hen, and dwell without all fear under that most ample and large heaven of the forgiveness of sins... And although we see [our sin], and for the same do feel the terrors of conscience, yet flying unto Christ our mediator and reconciler (through whom we are made perfect), we are sure and safe... Thus a Christian [person] is both [saint] and a sinner, holy and profane, an enemy of God and yet a child of God.

Martin Luther; Galatians

This may be a good way of understanding who we are as created beings, but God in Christ calls us to more, and this was at the heart of Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Over the last month I have been telling you about the Corinthians. You know that Corinth was an important port on an important trade route, which made it and its citizens a wealthy, cosmopolitan, liberal, and religiously pluralistic society, who did not like to be told what they could and could not do and how to live by Paul.

"Oh those silly Corinthians!" we might be tempted to say, but are we that different?

I think that we are in a time in our society more like First Century Corinth than any time before.

- In the 70's we were concerned with the occult – remember that?
- Then in the 80's we were concerned with the Moonies and the Hare Krishnas. Remember them?
- When I was in seminary in the 90's we were concerned with New Age religions. Remember them?

Now? There are shuttered church buildings all over the place and the United States is now the largest mission field in the world. Churches from all over the world are sending missionaries to the United States to save us!

As I have said several times in the last six months, right now there are families driving by our church going to some wholesome family event like a soccer game or softball tournament, and the child in the back seat looks out and sees a church and all the cars parked in front of it and asks his or her parent what people do in those buildings, and the parent responds, "I don't know. I've never been in one."

In this decade we should be concerned, not with another religion, but with apathy and ignorance. People just don't care anymore, and dare I say it, that is within the membership of the church and non-members outside the church.

Paul got it. Paul knew that toe-dipping was not the way to live the disciplined life of a Christian. Paul knew that the Corinthians liked the idea of eternal life, something unique among the many religions the Corinthians could choose from, they just didn't like the rules, laws, and commandments that came along with it. They wanted to cherry pick their way through their religious life. I think we do too.

Paul began this passage by writing that "**<sup>1</sup>We work together with him**", the him being Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit. You know that it takes knowledge of Jesus Christ through scripture to know what the godly life is, and the Holy Spirit to guide you along the way. But this requires being open to it.

To say I am a Christian and not apply Christian discipline to my life is to rely on what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap Grace." He wrote this in his book, The Cost of Discipleship,

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Paul wrote on that while the grace of God is not cheap, it is free – the free gift of God through the cross of Christ.

Last Tuesday I had the honor of presiding at the funeral of Pati Bevan, the neice of our Lawsons. In my homily I said, "Pati was just 58 when she died. I too am just 58. She graduated from high school in 1978. I too graduated from high school in 1978. She was married to her beloved Rick who is a year older than her in 1980. I married my wife, Carol who is a year older than me in 1981. I'm not comfortable or happy with those coincidences. But as sister Pati's sister Karen said on Monday afternoon, though Pati was relatively young for a decedent, we, her contemporaries, have to realize that 58 is not young either."

I bring that up now because it is true what Jesus himself said, we know not when he will return and the end of the age will come. The best way to be ready, as he repeatedly exhorted, is to live a disciplined and godly life now. Or as Paul paraphrased the OT Prophet Isaiah,

<sup>2b</sup>See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

To those ornery, thinking too much of themselves, Corinthians, Paul wrote that they need to get their spiritual lives in order, and then come what may, their eternal destiny will be assured – as much as anything taken in faith can be assured.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

What does this mean for you and me? I am so glad you asked. It is my Raisin' the Bar Challenge this week. If you are baptized child of God and you call Jesus Lord

of your life, then you have nothing to worry about. Your eternal destiny is assured - as much as anything taken in faith can be assured.

But again, if you are a baptized child of God and you call Jesus Lord of your life then, the living of your life ought to bear witness to that. Does it? If not, why not?

Or as it is alleged that St. Francis said,

**Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.**

**St. Francis**

When should the disciple who is a baptized child of God who calls Jesus Lord of their life begin living the Christian life? Now! Now is the day of your salvation.

### **Prayer**

God of all creation. You sent Jesus to save us, not just from sea and storm, but also from our stubborn selves. Help us to heed the encouragement given by the Apostle Paul to live lives worthy of our repentance, which only comes through Jesus Christ. And LORD, let this be the acceptable time, the day of our salvation. We pray this in the only name that saves, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen