

Sunday, July 3, 2016 - If God loves me just as I am, why would I change?

Romans 5:1-5

Marysville United Methodist Church

Pastor Jenny Smith



Story of breaking the glass sliding door - June 7 - hot day - cooking - frustrated - slammed door - look what happened!

Isabella: "Mom, that was not a good choice!"

I had a very visible representation of my anger. My kids saw it. My husband saw it. I've been reminded every day for the past month while we wait for it to get fixed.

Which introduces a disconnect in my soul. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ and I believe God loves me as I am. That's grace. But I'm also a sinner. I

routinely walk away from God's dreams for my life. Maybe you do too. This makes the question for today a good one:

If God loves me just as I am, why would I change?

How do we reconcile the nature of grace and sin. I remember thinking as a young person, "well if God loves me as I am, then I can do whatever I want. God will still love me."

Then I saw this one day: "God loves you just the way you are, but refuses to leave you that way (Max Lucado)."

Hmmm.

Let's look at a piece from the book of Romans first. Then we'll talk a little about the non-conformity statement our conference voted on last week, a story from my life and we'll wrap up with a conversation about corn and communion.

Scripture

How do you handle the moment trouble enters your life? Do you dig in your heels and brace yourself for a fight? Do you quickly run away and hide in a corner, hoping it will pass? The author of the book of Romans has a weird suggestion for responding to trouble.

Verse 3-4: We take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

*MSG: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In **alert expectancy** such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!*

That's so weird. Why would we be happy about pain? Why would we cultivate a posture of openness and acceptance for difficulty in our life?

One by one, I look around different areas of my life and ask God to show me where is there something that's not You? Everything is fair game. My marriage, friends, exercise, food, relationship with media, caring for creation, pride, relationship to the poor, Sabbath, family, extended family, my schedule, control issues, raising children, my relationships with my co-workers, my rootedness in this community.

This is what it means to follow Christ. We're willing to open up any part of our life and let Jesus lead us in a new direction.

Does this mean who I am now is bad? No. God created you and said it was **good**. But we also walk away from God often. And yet, God is always ready and willing to do something new in my life.

Corn

The other day, I invited Wesley and Isabella to peel the layers of the husk off the corn. Isabella set right to work but Wesley looked at it like I was crazy. I started to peel one off and showed him he could pull it the rest of the way. He did that and threw it in the trash. And looked up at me. I said, "more." And he pulled another one off. And another one. And another one. Then one of them revealed the sweet golden corn underneath. His eyes shone and he clapped his hands with glee. He loves corn on the cob! Wesley finally got to the reason we were doing the work. The reward.



That's our life of faith. We're not straining and striving to find God outside of ourselves. Instead, we're removing layers and baggage that build up over time that keeps us from seeing the spirit of Jesus in our lives. We're returning to the simple faith we had as a child.

The spirit of Jesus Christ is in here. And most of us adults have buried it deep within us. It's covered by all our "adult responsibilities" and all the things we "have to get done." We're big important people who can't be bothered by things like grace and joy and pausing to marvel at the creation around us. To avoid being hurt by the creator of the universe, we bury the call of Christ deep within our hearts. We figure as long as we're in control, we won't get hurt. We won't feel pain.

This is simply not true.

So we each have a choice. We can survey our lives with Christ and believe we've arrived. We attend worship, participate in a mission project and check the "church" box off. We can be present and active in the church and still be a piece of corn with all the husks fully intact.

OR we can fully welcome and integrate this good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for today. Jesus is with you now, before the change. Before the pain. Before the growth. You are good. **We can be content with God's presence in our life now. AND be open to how we can change.**

Jesus is with us when we see an opportunity to grow and we take a deep breath and say, "yes. I surrender. I let go. God, work in me. Show me how to follow you."

The good news is that Jesus is in all of it. We try to make it an either/or argument. Well if God loves me just as I am, why would I change? But it's not an either/or argument. It's a both/and moment.

God loves me just as I am. AND invites me to change.

May we be people who can experience both a deep sense of contentment with the life God has given us AND a sense that God calls us to a life of discipleship - of death and resurrection - of death and resurrection - of death and resurrection.

That is why we change.

Amen.