

**Reconciled**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**Roman 5:1-11**  
**3-15-2020**

We are God's beloved. This is a remarkable truth. And I'm not sure that it's a truth to which we give enough consideration. An infinite, benevolent, warm, ooey-goey Creator made our world, and made each of us, too! And somehow, some way, in the blueprint of this creation, God deemed each one of us *enough*. In other words, God created us in such a way that we are loved, simply because we exist; we have inherent worth and value simply because we are children or creatures of God.

Paul and others use the term *justified* to describe this phenomenon. I prefer to call it the *miracle of enough-ness, just because*. It really doesn't matter what you wanna call it, though. Here's what does: When you become aware of your unmistakable, unchanged, completely-justifiable value in the eyes of God, this world, the space you presently occupy, becomes a fundamentally different kind of place.

For Paul, such an awareness stopped him in his tracks, blinded him for three days, and changed his entire worldview. He'd spent a lifetime seeking his validation in God through a rigid and uncompromising application of Torah – he sought to justify himself by living perfectly in the law.

Something in the life of Jesus, reminded Paul that righteousness is not simply being right, whether ethically, or morally, or legally. Righteousness is not something one performs like a gymnast, or ice skater, hoping to impress a judge on technical and creative merits. But instead, righteousness is about being in right or proper relationship with God and neighbor.

If we know we are children of God; if we know God's got us, always; if we know God's love transcends time and space, then we begin to relate to one another in righteous ways. We begin to view the systems of this world differently. And we view God and neighbor differently, too. The statehouse, nor the faith house, nor the court house, nor the jail house, nor any house we manufacture can determine

our final worth. And our existence is no longer bound up in validation from systems that act as little gods, but is instead bound up in connection to God and neighbor.

The systems of this world seek to react and respond to their ideas of what God has been or what God might be. Some lament a loss of prosperity, of power and privilege, and they look to bygone days as proof that God was once with us. They rant and they rave, telling us that if only we'd reform to the policies of our past, God would appear again. Still others use God's perceived absence as a license to dehumanize those with whom they disagree, or as the reason for their current state of decline. Some are too future-focused. They long for the day that God will come again, but in their longing for what might be, they refuse to notice the beauty of what is. They cloak themselves in a self-proclaimed righteousness, and confident of their standing in a final judgment, they absolve themselves from the present: climate change, social injustice, war, nasty isms, even viruses are all but a temporary inconvenience and necessity.

But those who follow Jesus, recognize that God is always in the present. Therefore, authentic relationships with God and neighbor become more important than the artificial relationships like patron/client, ruler/servant, citizen/alien, the list goes on. And if that's the case, the inconvenient truths of this world's justice, must be replaced, immediately, with the lasting, authentic truths of God's justice.

Jesus lived, really lived, to remind us of the lasting truths of God's justice. And Jesus ultimately died, because Rome refused to own the inconvenient truths of its own worldly justice.

In this morning's text, we find Paul buoyed, excited, confident, at ease, called to his ministry, because of Christ's example.

I won't lie to you. There's a lot of today's text that I find uncomfortable. Paul's letters are but one piece of our scriptures that inform my faith, and many verses don't always reflect my personal theology. But I still respect these letters, and I try to view them in two ways. Yes, I think much of what Paul writes, he believes to be a declaration of truth – this is how I've seen God act in my life, and in the lives

of others. But I also think Paul invites us to come and see and discern for ourselves.

And I think Jesus did much the same. When Jesus said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” yes, he was making a declarative statement: “God’s doing something.” But he was also offering an invitation: “Come and see for yourself. And once you’ve seen, tell it, witness it in the way that works for you.”

Let me be clear: I don’t subscribe to the idea that God sent Jesus to the cross to atone for my sins, or for your sins, or for anybody else’s sins. And as I mentioned to you a few weeks ago, I don’t think that Eve trying a curious piece of fruit resulted in a sinful virus that corrupted the whole of humanity. Whoever those first earth creatures were, God deemed them enough, just like me, and you, and Paul, and Jesus, and all who have been and ever will be created. And finally, I do not subscribe to the idea of a kind of healthy suffering or trauma for us to celebrate as penance or discipleship for God.

But here’s what I do subscribe to: Jesus, more than anyone we’ve known to this point, lived in such a way as to fully-illumine the nature and character of God. *God is love*. And because Jesus lived fully, wholly-devoted to righteous relationships, Rome deemed he must die. But in living, Jesus also illumined how we can also live: living as if God is present, and we are present with God.

And Paul, yes with a zeal and a rigidness that’s not without its criticisms, chose to follow Christ’s example. And because he followed, there’s a system in place, again, not without its faults, which has allowed us to learn to live as if God is present with us, too.

In his life, Paul felt God was so present, that suffering (and he did a lot of suffering!) had a brighter side. Suffering offered endurance, endurance character, character hope, and hope, well hope manifested itself into spirit-filled hearts.

And you can hear Paul’s appreciation of an extraordinary miracle. God, loves and cares about me so much, even with all my faults, that I already have ultimate value. And when I live and acknowledge that ultimate value in myself, and in others, and most especially in God, I live in communities that are reconciled to one another and to God.

Of course, I just think it took Paul a few more verses to really articulate his message: In chapter eight he says, “Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God we know in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And I don't know about you, but even if Paul's not the warmest, fuzziest, most totally, progressive person in the world, those are words I desperately need to hear. Those are words that lift my spirit every time I hear them.

This is a hard week. There's a virus that makes us anxious. Our focus turns to the past about what we should've done. And our fears direct us to the future about what might happen. And in the present, too much attention turns to who we should blame, and who we should demonize.

And it seems to me that we're forgetting a God who is in the present. A God who's giving each of us value. I mean really, think about it: God has justified, God has given enough-ness to everyone: to people who are hoarding toilet paper; to officials who are too stubborn to be tested, or to set aside their egos and pride; to healthcare workers who are risking their safety; to people who are infected; to people who are indifferent; to people who are young; to people who are old; to everyone; TO EVERYONE.

And I wonder, is this a time, where love and righteousness have the potential to flourish? Is this a time where we realize that we must be in proper relationship with one another? Are we finally waking up to the idea of defining people based on their God-given value rather insisting on the arbitrary values of the artificial systems we cling to? What if March stopped being about madness, and started being about reconciliation?

Long ago, Jesus said it could be so. And Paul believed. And Paul lived in such belief. Today, we have the chance to do the same.

Friends, we have been reconciled with our Creator. Nothing will ever change that. Now let us be reconciled to one another!

May it be so! And may it be soon! Amen.