

Created for Good Works
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Ephesians 2:1-10

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in 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. ³All 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. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

John 3:14-21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Most of us here today are lifetime believers. We’ve heard these readings numerous times and the message of salvation which they convey more times than that. Oh, yes, John 3:16: for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. As lifetime believers, knowing that God loves us is as routine as knowing our alphabets. Just as we can tell you what letter follows “Q” without thinking about it, without thinking about it, we know that we are forgiven and freed from sin. Therein lies the challenge for long-time believers: we know it so we don’t think about it much, if at all. In that way, we can take God’s saving works on our behalf for granted.

For a little while this morning, I am going to ask that you use your imaginations. Imagine you’ve been you all along except you didn’t “buy in to” this Jesus stuff and maybe not even this God stuff. You still went about your day, you cared about friends and loved ones, you supported the food pantry and the

Hope Center and Waukesha Civic Theatre but you didn't give in to this idea that a couple of thousand years ago a man was sent from God, and somehow was God, and he let himself be killed to make the world a better place. Maybe you sit down on a sunny spring afternoon and watch the Brewers game or a brisk fall afternoon and watch the Packers. You see, again, that nut holding a John 3:16 sign and something causes you to look it up online or in your grandmother's Bible that you cherish, not because of what it is but because it was hers.

I invite you now to listen with new ears to selections from today's readings, with the ears of a person who hasn't gotten the hype, until now. We begin with John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God loved the world, not just the world right then but the world as all people across all time. That includes you. God loves you so much that he came to us as Christ so Christ could make it clear to us that God would go so far as to die in our place. God loves you so much that God would die for you and has died for you.

And John 3:17: Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. God has the right and the authority to judge us, and does, but that judgment does not ultimately end in punishment, or condemnation, but forgiveness. God looks upon our brokenness, looks upon your brokenness, and loves us. God's love does not change with any bad decision. Like a loving parent, God holds us accountable AND, more than anything, wants us to be whole again, as we were created. Through Christ, we are taught the clearest ways to work toward that wholeness - love God and love our neighbors. God will provide the opportunities to work toward wholeness, toward being more like God in whose image we were each created.

Which leads to John 3:21: But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. As you work toward wholeness, toward a closer reflection of God, what you do cannot help be a reflection of this God who so greatly desires such wholeness for you. And for me. And for the neighbor who plays music too loudly. And for the co-worker who always steals other people's lunches. Do you want to feel whole? Do you wish to have a blueprint, an instruction manual to get there? We just read from it today. Whatever you may face can be found in the pages of this book. The details may not be exact but the longing, the need, the confusion, the sorrow are all there, along with the way God is in relation with those same creatures who express those needs and sorrows.

If you were to flip to Ephesians, you would find these words: But God, who is rich in mercy, out of great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ

Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Mercy - heaven knows I need it; that righteous judgment of God's would reveal it even if I tried to hide behind the good works done at my convenience. This God who loves you greatly shows it in mercy toward you. Do not stay mired in the wrongs or ills or trespasses we have caused or not prevented. Time spent dwelling is time that could be better used focusing on the good yet to be done, good we can effect with our own hands. What are you waiting for? God in Christ has wiped the slate clean; today, right now, there is nothing stopping you from behaving as Christ did and does. You have been raised up with his example of true and obedient love of God.

And to close this section of Ephesians with verse ten: 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. Me, little ole' me, and little ole' you, have been made capable of greatness by God's hands. Where we have forgotten or gotten bogged down by rules and regulations and the constraints of our daily lives, Christ creates us or really, recreates us. In all the ways you get lost in your day, there is an unfailing light to guide you and, no matter how many times you look away from it, it is always there. Christ is always the beacon of truth and the right way. For you personally, Christ's example has been shared throughout generations and over centuries so you, here today, would have it to pick up and guide you and comfort you and strengthen you - whatever it is you need, it is here for you that you might find your way to do the good works for which you were created, to achieve the good which is your potential.

Knowing that, knowing what God has done for you, knowing what Christ has done for you is so humbling. In our culture of economy, the value of what we can give back is a shadow of the value of what we have received. Do not let that cultural view stand in the way of your grateful response; let it not hold you back further from growing into the you who God has made, let it not hold you back from the good works which God has prepared beforehand, befitting a way of life which cannot help but reflect God. If you strive to become the person you were created to be, then, indeed, Christ coming has made the world a better place, if only by one person.

Yesterday, I was honored to share the officiating of a wedding here in our sanctuary. The words of wisdom offered to the bride and the groom by the other minister caught my attention. She said, "your only job is to support the other person in being the person God created her to be, the person God created him to be." What a grace-filled approach to marriage, and, I thought, to life. What a beautiful way to look at loving your neighbor. We have each been created for good works; we have each been created to support one another in being the person God created that person to be. How true this is in light of our commitment to support new members. How true this is in our commitment to guide and nurture Kaelyn as she grows in Christ. How true this is.

Let us pray: Thank you, God. Thank you, Christ Jesus. Thank you for your love and for my freedom, for our freedoms, bought at the expense of your life. Give us strength to fully be who you have made us to be and give us love that we might support others in being fully who you have made them to be.

Amen.