

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Amen.

You may be seated. We begin our readings today with the Book of Isaiah, which makes it very clear that we are redeemed by God. He has called us by name, we are His, we are precious in His sight. In His eyes, we are honored and He loves us. Now, this is why, part of the reason why Isaiah is such an important book in the Old Testament. It is what we often have called the Fifth Gospel because there is so much about how God works His grace and mercy with humanity through His son Jesus Christ. Out of all of the Dead Sea Scrolls that they found, the one book that they found complete was the Book of Isaiah. It's been valued for thousands of years because it points us very clearly to Christ and because of Christ, the fact that we also are precious in the eyes of God because of Christ, because He is God's representation to us here on earth and because of His blessings, His perfection, we have hope.

And so John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and he did that and Jesus did not have to be baptized. John had a baptism for repentance and Jesus didn't need to repent for anything. He was perfect. And yet He was baptized like the sinners so that He might take upon the sin of humanity to Himself. In other words, He represented all of humanity in His baptism and took on the sin of all of humanity in His baptism so that He might carry our sin to the cross. So that when He was crucified, so were our sins. So that we were, as the Book of Romans says, "We were buried with Christ," our sins were buried with Christ in baptism, and we were brought forth in the hope of the resurrection new life in Christ. We are new creations in our baptism.

Now, last week we talked about how God has called us and adopted us as His children. And He has predestined us, He has chosen us by His own will. And in Isaiah we hear that He has redeemed us. You notice in the Book of Isaiah in this passage, there's next to nothing that we're supposed to do. It's all about what God is doing for us, that He has redeemed us, that He has called us by name, that even though we pass through waters and struggles, we will be kept safe because we are precious in His eyes. He will ransom other people to bring us back. He will do whatever he can to keep us safe in His fold, in His life. He calls us and gathers us because He has made us and He loves us. That is the God that we have and that is the reason that we put our hope in Him.

Not based upon our own activities or our own actions, as we learned last week, we don't earn the favor of God. We don't serve God in order that we might gain His favor or gain the inheritance. It's all ours in baptism. God has given us everything,

His whole promise, our faith, our salvation, our eternal life is ours now because we are baptized, because we are His children.

But then you look at Romans and obviously there's still a struggle going on because now that we know all of this, what shall we say? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Sadly, that's human nature. Think about the Israelites in the wilderness. They had been saved from Egypt. As He said, "I will ransom you from Egypt even, and from Cush and Sheba." So He brings the people of God out of Egypt, not because they were all that great of people. They weren't even worshiping Him by that time in Egypt. They were following after the gods of the Egyptians. And yet God came to them and redeemed them. Why? Because He had claimed them and because He loved them. And so He recognized and accepted the blood of the lambs on the doorpost on that first Passover and saved the Israelites through the blood of the lamb and brings them through the waters safely in the Red Sea into the wilderness.

Now, the Israelites who have seen all of these miracles and all these wonders of God, what do they do when they get into the wilderness? They grumble, they complain. They say, "Why God, why do we have to suffer so much? There's nothing to eat in this wilderness. All you give us is this manna and who knows what. And we're just tired. We had good food in Egypt. Our bellies were full, we were slaves. We had no freedom, but we had good food." Very short-sighted and very much focused upon themselves and what they wanted. And when a trial came, they abandoned all the glory and majesty of God that they had seen and they started complaining.

Now, as much as I would like to say, "Well, those dumb Israelites," I'm just like them unfortunately. I don't want to say that but that's what I have to say. And I think you would join me in this. Think about how many times we've seen God carry us through a difficult time, and the next time a difficult thing happens or a struggle happens in our lives, what do we do? We complain. Why me? Why is this happening? This shouldn't be happening. We forget. It's easy for us as human beings to focus upon the problems and to look to what we want to do and to travel and focus upon doing the pleasurable things rather than remembering that we are called by God. And so we are like the Israelites. We see the majesty of God and we quite easily and quite quickly forget and we focus upon and we sin. And we do what is wrong in the eyes of God. Why? Because we have not yet fully understood and been transformed because we are waiting for the fullness of the inheritance. Until that time when Christ comes, we are still affected by sin.

Now, it does not control us anymore. In baptism, our sin has been drowned and it is died. And it is now separate from us, but it still comes to try to deceive us. It still comes to try and pull us away from the Word of God. And when we focus upon the

sin, and when we do our own sin, we walk away a little and we find it more difficult to follow the Word of God. But what Romans is trying to encourage us in is we are called to focus upon the Word of God and what God has done for us, that He has saved us and He has redeemed us.

But because of that, we are then also called to serve Him, to live a life that is pleasing to God, to focus upon a life that is in Christ. And what does that mean for us? It does mean that we ought to, every day, be in the Word of God, to study His Word, to grow in our understanding of the Word of God, to allow the Word of God to dwell in us richly, to transform our thinking, to transform our speech, and to transform our actions so that when people hear us speak. And when people watch us act, they will see a person who loves God and who is loved by God. That's the prayer anyway. That's the hope.

And so I do encourage you, and I do exhort you every day of your life to be in the Word of God and to allow the Word of God, to transform your thinking and to prepare you for the difficulties and trials of this world so that you might be the light of Christ in this world, so that others might see the good works that you do and give glory to God. And so it is important for us, not because we think if we do it right, God's going to love us. But as we've learned, God already loves us and therefore we want to do what's right. We have to get the order right.

And the first order is we have been adopted by God and He loves us. We are precious in His sight. We have been forgiven all of our sins. Our sins have been crucified on the cross with Christ. We are forgiven, we are free from all of that. Let us not then take up our sins and bring them back to us. Let us continue to focus upon Christ and what He has done for us. Because we want to thank our Father for all of the good that he has done to us. We want to make our Father proud. Every good child wants their dad to think of them. "Hey, good job, son." How much more we want to want God to look upon us and say, "Well done my son and my daughter."

And so I do encourage you every day to seek and strive to be a better person, to be more focused upon God and His Word and what He would have you say, what He would have you think and what He would have you do. But of course, all of this is dependent upon and based upon and standing upon the sure and certain knowledge that we are already loved by God and forgiven. If you get it wrong, there's a way to deal with that. Go to the Lord, confess your sins, and He is faithful and just, and He will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

And so we start with the Word of God. We start with the gospel. And with the gospel as our foundation, it then leads us to serve, leads us to think and to speak differently. And also leads us when we fail to do that, which unfortunately we will do, to go back to the source of our hope: the Word of God and the promise of

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salvation that He gives to us. Because we know this. We are precious in the eyes of God. You are precious in the eyes of God. He loves you, He has forgiven you, He has adopted you as his child, and He will never leave you nor forsake you. Hold fast to that no matter what happens and may His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.