



THE CHAPEL OF CYPRESS COVE

INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP SERVICE – AUGUST 29, 2021

Good morning and I hope the beginning of your is progressing well? As we awaken each morning, we should pause and say “Thank you God for this day”. This doesn’t have to be a prayer but a simple acknowledgement and appreciation to Almighty God for your night and to be a part of your daily life.

As the world continues to suffer from the COVID pandemic we need to pray for our medical providers who are under great pressure and even exposure to this disease. Also, as we move once again through worshipping virtually, I ask you to pray for all of us who not only bring you these virtual services but for all Christians who are also displaced in mind, body and spirit because we aren’t collectively worshipping together. We’ll all get through this like we did before and continue to sing praises to Almighty God. So, today join me as we call ourselves to worship God.



Title: Saving A Life Of 2 Or 3 Or 4 or More! August 29, 2021

Texts: Philippians 1: 12-14, 24-27

Rev. Ted Althouse

I think most of you know that for many years I have officiated celebration of life services for the families that have lost a loved one. This service has become a valued part of my overall call to pastoral ministry. It is during this time of grief that I’m there with these families to provide words of God’s comfort and love. I try to assure these families that while their loved one’s earthly life has come to an end; they are now living in another dimension...called heaven. As a Christian, we know that Christ also died a human death...but yet he lived...and continues to live in the hearts of all who believe in him. And this is what we, as Christians, desire to also have when our earthly life comes to an end...to live on in eternity with Almighty God in heaven. As we get older, we begin to think more seriously about our mortality and how we can progress in our human path of life to the fullest capacity...for our self and for others.

I’ve shared this true story before and it fits into today’s scripture message. When I was the pastor at Estero United Methodist church, I received a late-night frantic phone call from one of our faithful members, who had just received a call from their 35-year-old son who told them he wanted to say goodbye as he was about to end his life. They knew where he was calling from and I told them that I would meet them there. We all arrived about the same time and the parents produced a key and unlocked the front door. They had called the police who also arrived. The police wanted to immediately storm the place....but I quickly introduced myself and asked them, out of respect of my authority as the young man’s pastor, to allow me to talk with him from the open door before anything else took place. After this brief discussion, the police relented and I was allowed to talk to the young man who was holding a loaded gun to his head. To make a very long story shorter...I was able to avert the pending suicide...and saved his life who went on to dedicate his life to saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Also, in the late 70's I had taken a group of people from my first church in Fort Myers to experience the poverty as well as the beauty of the country of Haiti. Among the group was a dear friend who took her teenage grandson to experience how life can be so different. One year after we returned, she called me to request that I officiate his funeral service. Stephen, age 17 and who I led to Christ on that mission trip, committed suicide because he was bullied in school when it was learned that he was gay. I could not save Stephen's earthly life but I did save him for his eternal life. I further counseled his grieving family for almost a year, especially his devout Christian grandmother and mother who needed to understand that God loves everyone, no matter who they are, and that we have an advocate who grants us mercy for our indiscretions if we seek "spiritual forgiveness", through Jesus Christ.

Let me pause for a moment to remind you of a simplified definition of the words "spiritual forgiveness". Spiritual forgiveness is: *the letting go process of earthly indiscretions and actions*. In the Bible, this includes forgiving everyone, every time, of everything, as an act of obedience and gratefulness to God. It acknowledges the sacrifice God made through His Son Jesus who died to restore the relationship between God and humankind.

For some individuals this process of spiritual forgiveness is not understood as a way for God to be an integral part of our life. Often, we use our human intellect to try to create our own definitions to fit our own thinking...this is human nature. But when it comes to spiritual definition and understanding of spiritual words and direction, we must understand them through the Divinity of Almighty God/Jesus Christ/Holy Spirit. This is where reading scripture and prayer help with our personal understanding.

I bring this valuable information to you as an introduction to today's scripture when the apostle Paul was in prison (because he preached about the saving grace through Jesus Christ). Now here again I pause to bring you another definition of the words: *SAVING GRACE: Saving grace is the divine assistance that God imparts to those who receive Christ as their Savior to become born-again (converted) into following the ways of Christ*.

While Paul was in prison, he had his own moments of despair. But I must quickly add that Paul was never despondent enough to the point of ever considering taking his own life. Why? Because Paul was a dedicated servant of Almighty God – through Jesus Christ - and realized that God's holy spirit will provide the required guidance through all traumatic life events. Paul used his time in prison not only to uplift his own spirit but the spirit of fellow prisoners and writing to the various churches which he was concerned about. He was all about saving a life of two or more of other individuals. Listen to his own words: *"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else, that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."* (v12-14) Paul used the negative aspects in his life as a positive. He took this time to spread the word of God to everyone in and out of the prison...and remember he even converted prison guards to following the teachings of Christ. Paul realized that God is in total control of everything... even in the dungeons of a prison. It was there that Paul became more aware of his own important role in his ministry...and that was - first to continuing telling others about Jesus Christ and what Christ means in their life....and second, to show (by example) how having Christ in your heart will overcome the worst obstacles of life. Remember Paul was in the worst prison in Rome and yet he was alive...both in body and spirit...nothing could keep the Spirit of God from his soul.

This is a wonderful example of what God will do for those who know and accept his son Jesus Christ as the master of their life. God present in our life will, and I repeat, will provide the positive direction during the most difficult times of our life. It is a known fact, through numerous studies, that there are less suicide deaths among the dedicated Christian community than in any other religious or secular part of society. Why? Because

the true believer in Christ has a defined “link or connection” between him/her self and the creator of life...Almighty God.

Now listen to more of Paul’s encouraging letter: *“I am torn between the two; I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for me to remain in the body”*. (v24) Here we see the human side of Paul. He knew the pain of suffering (while in prison) and he also knew that his life after death would be with Christ in heaven. But more importantly, he realized that if he was no longer on earth, he would no longer be Christ’s human disciple to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Lesson to learn! The Christian who acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and savior, knows the value of their own spiritual inheritance...eternity in heaven....but (and here is the big but)...but we must also realize that our earthly presence is very vital to Christ’s ministry on earth. Our very existence on earth is important in spreading God’s word in every possible manner...and hopefully bringing other individuals to the saving grace, through Jesus Christ to Almighty God. The true believer in Christ knows that being with Christ in heaven means farewell to earthly sin, temptation, sorrow...as well as, the many problems of this world. It is for this reason that God calls us home...but only in his own time and with acceptance of His son Jesus Christ. As we all know, much of the medical community of today has been conditioned to provide continued care if any form of life remains...even if means years of costly care...and often this is administered without any thought to religious belief or planning. Let us never forget that the death of a Christian is a joyous triumphal entrance into the arms of our Creator...and should not be hampered by extensive complicated and prolonged medical means. I realize this position remains somewhat controversial but it is real and needs to be addressed openly. My position is that we, who truly believe in a spiritual life after death, in the presence of Almighty God...must be vocal and let our final end of life events on earth be carefully known...such as in a living will and the inclusion of palliative hospice care. (I am a former hospice chaplain and take this stand because I have experienced many forms of death and dying that no human individual should have to endure without loving palliative care.) This is not...and I repeat...not self-annihilation but actually allowing a no-longer functioning living individual the decency to finally come into the presence of Almighty God without more prolonged suffering and pain.

Now with all this said and you now know some of my personal beliefs...I do not want anyone to leave think, with the minutest thought that I condone any form of self-destruction/suicide. What I am saying is that there can be a time when, with the full agreement of immediate family and the medical community, that a person can allow his/her earthly life comes to an end in a personal and dignified manner. I want this for myself if needed and my non-productive life calls for God to invite me home to be with him on HIS terms. I have also come to the understanding that God must and will be present in these difficult decisions and it is his will to give us final rest.

The Apostle Paul had similar beliefs and he knew there was no comparison to living in this world than being in the kingdom of heaven. But he also realized that it was important to continue his life and ministry on earth as long as he was mentally and physically able to do. So, he did just that. If you don’t remember, Paul’s earthly life ended at the hand of Nero in 34 AD by the cruel act of beheading. But before his terrible death, Paul said: *“convinced of this (meaning life with Almighty God), I know that I will remain and I will continue with you for your progress and joy in faith...”* (v25) Paul was thoroughly convinced of the divine plan of God and that God wanted only the best for him and everyone he ministered to. He also knew that he could do more to spread God’s word and the saving grace of Jesus Christ on this earth...than if he were no longer on this earth. However, little did he know that his work and his words would continue even to this day.

It is here that Paul has taught us that we must progress in life with faith in Christ as long as possible...so that others can and will see, with their own eyes, the Christian joy we have through knowing Christ as our personal Savior. Paul gave encouragement to his followers (which includes you and me today) to continue on in God’s

plan of our life. He said; *“whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”*. (v27) Paul did not know what the authorities would do to him while in captivity, so he gave great encouragement to his followers to also continue on as ambassadors of Christ...saving a life of one or two or more. This is our encouragement as well...to continue on as Christ’s ambassador in every part of our life. Yes, times it can become difficult...but God is with us every step of the way. Paul realized this and we must also.

Saving a life of one or two or three or four or more! That is what Jesus wanted for his disciples to continue to do after he was gone...and this is exactly what he wants each of us to do also. We must not allow ourselves to get so caught up in our own personal life’s events that we cannot see the needs of others. Paul was a prime example of this...especially when he was in prison. He reached out to the world around him...and spread the good news of Jesus Christ...and the plan of his saving grace.

Paul ended his message with these words: *“Know that I will remain and will continue with you for your progress and joy in faith, so that through my being with you, your joy in Jesus Christ will overflow on account of me”*.v25-26 Paul’s words? Yes...and they should remain as ours as well...each of us. Jesus Christ continues to save lives...here on earth so that those who believe in the saving grace of Christ will have eternal life. Will you do me a favor? Will you assist Christ in helping save other’s lives with sharing the good news of salvation through Christ’s words and actions? I hope so!