

“Never Too Late”

Galatians 1:13-24

June 9, 2013

3rd Sunday After Pentecost

Once, on Becky Schlund’s birthday, Pastor Schlund was out to get her favorite treat for her birthday: a piece of fresh strawberry pie. There was a restaurant in the small town in Wisconsin where they lived which specialized in just such a thing. On his way home, after an evening appointment, he stopped at the restaurant to get the pie. There was only one problem. He arrived there at 8:01 PM and the restaurant closed at 8:00 PM. He opened the outer door to the restaurant just as the manager was coming out to close it and lock up. He said, “Sorry, you’re too late. It’s closing time.” (Becky had to wait until the day after her birthday to get her strawberry pie year.)

“You’re too late!” Maybe that’s happened to you, too. You go to a store for a sale, but all the good merchandise is already gone. You are too late. Or, maybe you want to reserve a hotel room on a family vacation, but you find that all the rooms are gone because of a convention in town. You are too late.

Sometimes, we approach our relationship with God in the same way. We know of God’s great love and forgiveness. We know of the new life God offers through His Son, Jesus Christ -- a life that begins now and continues for all eternity in the joys of heaven. But, due to some terrible sin on our part, either real or perceived, we may get the feeling that it is “too late” for us. We know the familiar Bible verse – John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” and we think, sure, God loves the world, but I have crossed over the line. I have committed the unpardonable sin. All of that love and forgiveness is gone. It is too late for me. There are people out there who still feel guilty and unloved by God because of an offense committed 20 years ago. They feel it’s just too late for them.

We also look at people who do not even know Jesus Christ and worry about them. These people are members of your own family - children, spouses, and relatives. These people are our

friends and neighbors. These people are people we work with. Perhaps you have tried to share the love of Jesus Christ with them by sharing your own personal faith or inviting them to church with you and you have been rebuffed and rejected. We may feel angry and say, “Well, it’s too late for them. They have rejected God’s grace.” Or, out of genuine Christian love and concern, we may lament, “Well, it’s too late for them. They have rejected God’s grace.” Although we may feel that way, is it true? Is it too late for such people?

There is no doubt that God is indeed angry at our sin and rebellion. That sin and rebellion earns each of us a place of eternal torment in hell forever. There will indeed be a time when it will be “too late” to receive God’s mercy and eternal life. There will be a time when Jesus will say, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.!”

But, thanks be to God, that time is not now! For as much as God is angry over our sins, He much more loves us with a deep and abiding love. For, at our sinfulness and rebellion, God did not simply lock the door to heaven and say, “You’re too late!” He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place and for our sins so as to lead us back to Him and keep the door to eternal life propped open.

Psalms 107:1 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” As long as we live on this earth, His love is present among all people working to change them. A good example is in our text. We often think of the Apostle Paul as being a mighty preacher and the author of much of the New Testament. What we may forget or may not even know is Paul’s former life. He was a very good man in the Jewish religion. He followed all the rules and was very zealous. However, he had completely rejected Jesus Christ as his Savior. In fact, he hated Christ and His followers. In his own words in our text, Paul says, “how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.” Paul not only rejected Christ, but worked long and hard to arrest Jesus’ followers, throw them into jail, and have them killed. (Think of that: although our friends and family may reject

Christ, I doubt that many, if any, would be as hostile as this.) If anyone was never going to be a Christian, it was Paul.

Yet God's love was able to change Paul. Long before he persecuted the church and even before he was born, God had chosen Paul to be His own through faith in Jesus Christ. God called Paul while he was traveling on the road to Damascus in Syria to root out and arrest more Christians. After his conversion, God sent Paul out to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles throughout the known world and blessed his work. The rest, as we say, is history.

Now, if God's love and grace are able to change such a blatant enemy of Jesus Christ and persecutor of His Church, He is certainly able to change anyone today. Think of your own lives. God has certainly changed you. All of you were born into sin. Through His grace in baptism, God changed you and brought you into His Church. Perhaps you have been life-long faithful members ever since. Thank the Lord for that.

Perhaps there are others here who wandered away from God's grace during their teenage years or those who never knew God's grace until later in their lives. God's love worked to change you through His Word and strengthen you through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. You are now faithful members of God's holy Christian church who are eager and willing to worship God and serve Him in this place. We praise God for that, as well.

But what about those people we know who do not yet follow Jesus Christ with us? Do we give up on them, either in sadness or anger? No. God's love is able to change anyone. Sometimes, like Paul, this change will happen only after a period of many years and much rejection of Christ. But it can happen!

That changes our whole attitude to those around us who do not share our common faith in Jesus Christ. Instead of dismissing those people with the attitude that "it's too late for them," we continue to seek them out and share God's love with them. Instead of anger over their refusal to acknowledge Jesus Christ and Savior and Lord, we can love them since we know that God also loves

them. Instead of frustration over their unwillingness to accept our invitation to worship or be involved in God's Word with us, we can have patience since we know God is being very patient with them and giving them every opportunity to repent and believe before it is truly too late.

If there is someone in your family or group of friends with whom you have been trying to share the Gospel or invite them to church and they have been rejecting you, don't give up. Continue in your efforts. Some of those people, like Paul, although hostile to Christ now, have been chosen by God before birth to be members of His Kingdom in heaven. The Holy Spirit is using you as His tool to bring that message to them. He will give you the power to go on witnessing. And it is He who will bring about the results. You don't have to worry about it. Some of these people, known only to God, will be changed and come to faith in Jesus Christ. They will join us in our group of believers at Peace. And, even more wonderful and important, they will join us in eternal life in heaven.

There are many opportunities for you to be late in this life and be penalized for it: You can be late for buying plane tickets and get none. You can arrive late for work and be fired. You can even be late for a church service and miss it. But, as far as God goes, it is never too late to enter into His Kingdom in this life. His love and mercy continue forever for all people. That's good news! Rejoice in that for yourself. Have hope in that as you try to share His love. Keep speaking His Word of forgiveness and eternal life. Keep inviting people to worship with us and learn of His love in Bible Class. Don't become frustrated! Don't give up! It's never too late! Amen