

SERMON TITLE: "Meditations on the Cross: The Redemption of God"
SERMON TEXT: Colossians 1:9-14, 19-20
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: April 10, 2022 at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

Because I've been preaching a series of meditations on the cross, Karen Miller brought me a cross that had been given to her as a gift from Sylvia Brooks. You may not be able to see it well from where you are, but this cross is decorated with the treble clef musical symbol. Along with the cross came a cardboard tag that Karen never removed because it holds a Musician's Prayer that goes like this:

When music is a prayer, a sacred melody,
it's like a special love song, a perfect harmony.
A heart that's filled with music, whose love for God is strong,
is the heart that's full of worship, and whose life becomes a song.

Music certainly is a prayer of worship. The Psalms, which today we usually think of as something to read, were actually songs that the Jewish people sang. So, on Palm Sunday, as the Passover celebrants waved their branches and processed along the parade route through the gates of Jerusalem, the crowd was also singing Psalm 118: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!"

Those worshipers were singing a traditional song of their faith, and they were praying for God's salvation to come. We don't really know what they expected. On that parade day when they hailed Jesus as their savior and king, did they know that they would soon be shouting "Crucify him!?" Did they know that their salvation would come through Jesus' death on a cross?

All through this Lenten season we've been pondering what exactly happened when Jesus died. In so many ways, it was a horrific and unjust tragedy. And yet, God was able to take the foolishness of the cross and turn it into the power and wisdom of God. We've also seen how the cross offers us salvation through the love of God, the Lamb of God, and the Great High Priest of God. Last Sunday, we talked about how the cross helps us experience the reconciliation of God in our vertical relationship with

Christ and in our horizontal relationships with other people. And today, in this final sermon in this series, I invite you to consider our scripture text from Colossians, chapter one. Let's see how the cross leads us to the redemption of God.

1—REDEMPTION FROM

The way I read these verses in Colossians, there are basically two ways to understand the redemption of God that comes to us through the cross. The first way is what we receive redemption *from*. In Colossians 1:13, the Apostle Paul writes that God “has rescued us *from* the power of darkness.” By “power of darkness,” of course, Paul means all the messy wretchedness of our human ways. This redemption *from* comes through the forgiveness of our sins.

If we read further in this letter, we can get a more complete picture of what Paul was thinking. In Colossians 1:21, Paul indicates that the Christians in the city of Colossae were “once estranged and hostile in mind.” In other words, they weren't on the same page with God, they weren't on the same team with God, they weren't cooperating with God, and—in fact—they were in outright opposition to God. I suspect you understand what Paul means, because we've all been there sometimes.

In Colossians 2:13, Paul writes that the Colossians were once “dead in trespasses.” That's Paul's way of saying that the Colossians were living in a way that was destructive to themselves and to others. They were disobeying God's laws and living with the guilt of all that. But the redemption of God, which forgives our sins, removes the judgment, fault, and condemnation for what we have done wrong. In Colossians 2:13, Paul says that God's redemption “erases the record that stood against us with its legal demands.” Our criminal record is expunged, or set aside, as the list of our sins is nailed to the cross.

Of course, the power of darkness isn't just a thing of the past. Even as Paul writes to the Colossians about his gratitude to God for the faith that they've had, you can tell that he's also worried about them in the present time. So, in chapter three, Paul warns them about the power of darkness that's still a danger. In Colossians 3:5, he tells them to “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is

earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).” And in 3:8, Paul implores them to rid themselves of “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.” You get the idea. It’s time to take out the trash. It’s time to allow Jesus’ death on the cross to rescue us from all that rot and decay.

Repeatedly, Paul reminds the Colossian Christians that they have already died to sins, so these things should now be over and done and in the past. Through their spiritual connection with Jesus’ death on the cross, they have the power to put to death those traits, habits, and weaknesses of their former life. In Old Testament times, God had miraculously redeemed the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and from captivity in Babylon. Now, in Christ, God was redeeming the people again by rescuing them from slavery to sin. Through the power of the cross, God was releasing them from the grip of their own wrong attitudes and behaviors.

None of us likes to think very much about our faults. Such introspection is painful, so we prefer to live in denial of how our bad attitudes and behaviors damage our lives and hurt others. But, if we’re honest, we all know that sin is an ever-present problem. Like the Palm Sunday crowd that exalted and praised Jesus one day, we can easily turn around and crucify him another. So it’s crucial that we keep our eyes focused on the cross. Jesus died there, and if we accept it, his death can be that redemption of God that allows us freedom from the power of darkness.

2—REDEMPTION FOR

As good as it is to be redeemed *from* the negatives of sin, it’s important to know that we can also receive redemption *for* positive alternatives. Redemption is more than the absence of evil. It is also for the addition of good. In Colossians 1:9-14, Paul gives a rich and ample description of this positive redemption that comes to us from Jesus’ death on the cross.

In verse 9, we see that our redemption of forgiveness is given so that we “may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” We aren’t plucked out of sin and

washed off in baptism just so we can act stupidly all over again. God has a better plan in mind for us. God has hopes and dreams and callings for us to fulfill. That means we need to open our minds to learn of God's purposes. We need to be willing to read the Bible and study. We need to have daily devotional practices. We need to attend worship and pray. We need to put in our time so that we increase in faith. But all that begins with our redemption through the cross of Jesus, which makes it possible for this growth to happen. Once the junk is cleaned out of our brains and our hearts, then there's room for God to fill us with that spiritual wisdom and knowledge.

In verse 10, we see another positive benefit to our redemption. When we receive redemptive forgiveness, we begin to "lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to God, as we bear fruit in every good work." While it's great to have open minds that study the scriptures and learn about God, it's also important for us to live and do and act in ways that are pleasing to God. For example, it's good to read in our Bibles that we should share our food with the poor. But it's also important to do things like some of you did yesterday, when you participated in the Rise Against Hunger project at Community UMC. By physically assembling 20,000 bags of food that will be sent around the world, you were "bearing fruit in every good work."

God's redemption of forgiveness also makes us strong. We see this in verse 11, where Paul writes that we get this strength "from God's glorious power." This strength is given to us so that we may "be prepared to endure everything with patience." This endurance and patience will certainly help us cope with misery, if we must. But Paul expects better for us than that. In the redemption of God, we aren't just having to tolerate the terrible. Instead, we are able to live joyfully. As verse 12 says, we're able to "give thanks to the Father who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light."

Do you hear what the redemption of God is? Not only are we freed from sin; we're set free for a wonderful life. We're given strength, endurance, patience, joy, and gratitude. We get to enjoy the

company of the saints. We are redeemed from the power of darkness so that we are enabled to share in the blessings of the light.

CONCLUSION

I suppose, as long as we live in this world, there will always be a struggle between the powers of darkness and the power and light of God. And, that's why, I suppose, we Christians have such an interest in our life after death. We want to believe that there will be an eternal redemption in which we are finally and forever redeemed.

You might recall the song in Handel's *Messiah* that goes, "I know that my redeemer liveth . . . and though worms destroy this body, yet . . . shall I see God." Those words were inspired by Job 19, where the man who was suffering excruciating pain and loss expressed his belief that one day he would be justified and all would be set right.

Just as Christians later applied those ancient words of Job to Jesus, may we also know that our redeemer liveth. May we believe now and always, that through the death of Jesus on the cross, we have access to the redemption of God.