

Pentecost 5 / June 23, 2024

2 Corinthians 6:2

“Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Now is the time of salvation

St. Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church was complicated and intense. On the one hand, the Corinthians were dear to his heart. On the other hand, they caused him much heart ache. He and his companions laboured hard among the Corinthians, teaching them the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, proclaiming the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus' name. He wrote two letters to them contained in the New Testament, possibly others not preserved by the Holy Spirit. He wrote so often, because their actions and attitudes were often contrary to the gospel of salvation in Jesus' name. This brought pain to his heart. In our text he felt it necessary to appeal to them not to receive the grace of God in vain. He urged them to open their hearts, both to his affections and especially to the affection of God in Christ Jesus, saying “widen your hearts.” He says to us as he said to them, ‘Don't put it off. Open your hearts to the Lord.’ Now is the time of God's favour. Now is the time of salvation!

It's easy to become distracted by the cares of life and close our hearts, both to God and to other people in our lives. It's easy to become focussed on our wants and forget about the needs of others. It's easy to forget about our need for God's love received through faith in Christ Jesus. Some of the Corinthians were so focussed on themselves, they were oblivious to the needs of others. Some of the Corinthians were so full of themselves, that they exalted themselves over others, because they felt they had greater spiritual gifts. They humiliated those whom they considered beneath themselves, because they weren't as full of the Spirit. It's easy to forget about God, others and our most important needs, as we focus on ourselves. In our text Paul reminds us there is no need greater than our need for God's grace. Nothing is more important than coming to God in Christ in the humility of faith. Now is the time of God's favour. Today is the day to attend to our greatest needs and receive His salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Where will you be in one hundred years? Wherever we are, one thing is certain, we won't be in this world. What is most important to you now? What will be most important to us in a hundred years? Is it the same thing? What will be most important in a hundred years is the same thing that is most important today; our relationship with God. There is nothing more important than our relationship with God. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are His creation. He breathes life into us and for a time, at His pleasure, we live and move and have our being. When the days He has set out for us are over, the breath of life will return to Him and our lives in this world will end. He is the source of our lives and so nothing is more important than attending to our relationship with Him.

Jesus told a parable about a man who spent his whole life amassing possessions, but who paid no attention to his relationship with God. He was rich in things of great value in the world and are important in time, but he was bankrupt in the things that are eternal and the riches that endure to eternal life. When he died, he had nothing, literally. He no longer had anything in the world. As Job said, we come in to the world naked and depart in the same way. He had nothing in the next world, because He had nothing in relationship with God. Jesus said, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.” In our text St. Paul calls us to pay attention to our most important relationship in this world and in the next, our relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus. In Him we receive the fulness of the riches of God in forgiveness and eternal life. Now is the favourable time. Now is the day of salvation.

There is nothing more important than the riches of God's love in Christ Jesus. There is nothing more important than the knowledge of God's love expressed in Christ Jesus. His life, the sacrifice of His cross, forgiveness through faith in Him as our God and Saviour. The promise of sharing in His resurrection, through baptism into His death and resurrection. St. Paul and his companions expressed this importance in their lives, by giving their lives wholly to the ministry of making Jesus known as God and Saviour. Their lives were dedicated to the ministry of proclaiming the gospel so that all people might hear, believe, receive the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus and have the promise of sharing in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. In our text Paul said that in every way they commended themselves as ministers of the gospel. They did this, not for their glory, but so that others would see the importance of their own relationship with God and receive the wealth of relationship with Him through knowing Jesus as God and their Saviour.

Paul and his companions endured afflictions, hardships, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger, sorrow and poverty, for the sake of the gospel ministry. The hardships they experienced and the sufferings they endured were not recorded for their glory, or as something others need to seek for themselves. These things experienced in their lives and in the lives of all the apostles, are recorded to highlight the importance of the gospel. They show our greatest need of body and spirit, which is to know God as Father through a relationship of faith in Christ Jesus. Many things are important in life. Nothing is more important than knowing God's love in Christ Jesus. Paul, his companions and the apostles, were set apart for the gospel, that in their lives and the things they experienced, we would see the importance of the gospel message. These things are written, so that we would take the gospel to heart and attend to it as of first importance. We will be somewhere in one hundred years. We will be somewhere forever. God gave Jesus His Son to be our Saviour so we would be with Him in eternity.

Paul writes: "We have spoken freely to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open...widen your hearts also." Paul certainly was concerned about the affections of the Corinthians for himself. He felt great affection for them. There is no greater dignity bestowed upon human beings, even in this fallen state, than to be able to love others. God created animals with a certain affection for each other, maternal affection anyway. Lions look out for each other in their pride. But when one member is too weak to travel the pride will leave it behind. The mother bear and tiger will fight to protect their young, but they don't run in groups. When the time comes, mother will give them a good smack and send them off on their own.

God created humans with the ability to love and the desire to care for others throughout our lives. We care for our parents and grandparents, even after we have come to physical maturity and have achieved personal independence. In Christ, God empowers us with His Spirit and with an even greater desire and ability to love others. We love because in Christ, He has loved us. Paul's heart was opened wide to the Corinthians, because He loved them. He loved them, because Christ had opened his heart to love. Christ opens our hearts to love, Him and others. Paul loved them as sisters and brothers in Christ, fellow members of God's family in Christ Jesus. He loved them so much that he never ceased telling them of the greatest love, God's; and their greatest need to receive His grace in Christ Jesus. He called them and he calls us, to open our hearts to God's love, by attending to our relationship with Christ Jesus. He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

As much as it is important to love others, our families and friends, it is most important to open our hearts to God's love in Christ Jesus. Now is the time of God's favour. Now is the time to enrich ourselves in relationship with God by attending to faith in Christ Jesus. As much as it is important to attend to our responsibilities in life, it is most important to attend to our greatest responsibility which is to attend to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. We open our hearts to God by meditating on the scriptures, spending time in prayer, returning to the promise of our baptism, receiving the nourishment of the Holy sacrament, the grace of forgiveness and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We will be somewhere in a hundred, two hundred and an infinite number of years. God gave Jesus so we would be with Him.

He gave Jesus to be our Saviour. He reconciled the world to Himself in the blood of His cross. In Christ, God opens His heart to us in love. His Spirit opens our hearts to Him, so we may treasure as of first importance Jesus Christ and attend to our relationship with Him as of the greatest important. The relationships of life pass away in time. Our relationship with God in Christ Jesus endures forever. Now is the time of God's favour. Today is the day of salvation! God open our ears to hear, our hearts to receive, our minds to believe and our lips to confess Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. In His Name. Amen