

Feb. 25, 2024  
Second Sunday in Lent  
Gen. 17:1-7,15-16, Rom. 5:1-11, Mark 8:27-38  
“The World’s Greatest Rescue ”

Today we want to talk about the world’s greatest rescue. In order to truly understand what that means, sometimes we have to use another example to get some context.

On November 7th, 1907, a boxcar containing dynamite caught fire in the village of Nacozari in Sonora, Mexico. When the flames reached the dynamite, the blast was felt 10 miles away. That would be like standing in the parking lot of Lappe Church and feeling the blast that went off at the Walmart on Red River Road.

The whole town of Nacozari should have been blown into the air like dandelion seeds scattered by a single, careless puff but it wasn’t! However, thanks to the railroad engineer, Jesús García, when he noticed that the boxcar had caught fire, he quickly drove the boxcar away from the town where it exploded harmlessly - harmlessly for the people of Nacozari, that is, but not harmlessly for Jesús.

Jesús himself died in the blast. He gave his life to save the lives of many. Why did he do it? We can’t ask him of course but I’m sure he would have said something like, “It was my job.”

There is, of course, another Jesús who gave his life in a daring rescue. On Good Friday, Jesus of Nazareth hitched the world’s sins to Himself and pulled them up on the cross where God’s fury exploded with a deafening silence that can still be heard 2,000 years later.

Why did Jesus do it? Step close and press your eye to the keyhole of the cross and you’ll see why he did it because you’ll be looking into God’s love. God’s amazing love.

Today we’ll see that God’s love is amazing because it’s for you, and it’s forever. The train engineer, Jesús García, is hailed a hero because he saved a town of hard working people, of boys and girls, and of grandpas and grandmas.

But what if he had driven a burning boxcar of TNT away from the mansion of a drug lord? Would newspaper headlines have read, “Jesús García demonstrates love by dying for drug lords!”?

More likely they would call him a fool for sacrificing his life for the sake of such deplorable people. Why not let the boxcar explode and take the drug lord and all his buddies with him?

Consider then what the Apostle Paul writes about the rescue Jesus pulled off. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the **ungodly**. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”.

“For if while we were **enemies**, we were reconciled to God, by the death of His son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.”

It is truly amazing that we can say, “I know God loves me” since by nature we are powerless, ungodly and an enemy. God has to bring us close to Him because there is no other way. We can’t do it ourselves.

“We are powerless. The word for **powerless** has the thought of being sick and tired and weary. When you are sick you don’t have the strength to work, or be with people or prepare a meal. You just want to stay in bed and sleep.

Because we are infected with sin from Adam’s fall and the results of that sin keep popping up in our lives, we have no power and no strength to do the right things to make God love us and care about us. We just keep turning out more sin not just by our thoughts and actions but also by what we fail to do.

Another word that describes how far we are away from God is the word “**ungodly**.” “Christ died for the ungodly.” It does not say that we are sometimes ungodly or even frequently ungodly. It says we are just plain ungodly. That means we are not like God. We do not measure up to his standard of righteousness and holiness and purity.

Some guy told me that he had asked a cheer leader, “What are the chances that you might go out with me?” She responded, “About one in a million.” Well he jumped up and down with joy because he at least had a one in a million chance of winning her affection.

But what is the chance of winning God’s favor and God’s love by our human effort and performance? It’s not one in a million. It is always zero. Zero times. Any number is always zero.

In fact there is still another word used here to show us how far we are from God and how much we need Jesus to rescue us and that is the word **“enemy.”** If you want to win friends and influence people, don’t tell them the truth about sin, and that sin is more than robbing banks and killing people.

If you tell them that sin involves every level of meanness that wells up in the human heart. It involves the idolatry of thinking too much about themselves and not enough about God, you may not get invited out to their place for Thanksgiving Dinner. Because you see the human heart is hostile toward God and God’s plan to rescue us through the death of his Son.

Remember the story that Jesus told about the lost son. That son demanded his share of the family inheritance. He could care less what financial impact that had on his father who loved him. Then he went as far away from home as possible and spent the money in wild living.

He could not stand to be in presence of his father who loved him and wanted him as his son. That’s where we once were, and that’s where we would be today if it had not been for God’s love that reached out to us and brought us back through Jesus. Oh the incredible love of our God.

Let me ask you? Would you send your child or grandchild on to thin ice to rescue his drowning friend even if you knew your son would die in the process? What if that drowning kid WASN’T your son’s friend, but the bully who had stolen your son’s lunch money and covered him with bruises and ridicule every recess since kindergarten?

That's what God did when He sent Jesus to rescue us...and for free. You'll never receive a bill in the mail for what God did to save you. God's love is amazing because it's for you no matter how "terrible" the sins you have committed or how small you may think those sins are.

Sometimes when I listen to the news it's makes me so angry when I hear how a gang member escapes conviction on some technicality. Especially when I know that the gang member is just going to keep ruining lives with his illegal activities. And don't you think God's blood boils too when we continue to step outside of His boundaries even after He sent his Son to save us?

Every morning I pray to be more patient and not make minor issues into major ones, but sometimes it only lasts half a day. Is God's love withdrawn from me when that happens? Do we temporarily lose our spot in heaven when we break the law and exceed the speed limit?

No. God's amazing love is forever. You and I continue to stand in His grace. That grace holds us to God's heart the way your seatbelt holds you into your seat not just when you're cruising safely down the highway but even when you're crashing into a barrier!

And so I don't have to worry about dying before I can confess some sin – as if God's love and forgiveness is something I earn by constant confession. No, my status with God depends on what Jesus has done for me.

Through faith in Him I am and remain a forgiven child of God. No matter what foolish thing I did yesterday. No matter what boneheaded thing I said this morning. Everything is OK between God and me, for Jesus' blood constantly cleanses me from my sins the way eyelids constantly whisk away irritants from the eyes by blinking every few seconds.

So now that you know this, doesn't it mean that we can live any way we want – as if Jesus' blood scotch guards us so that we can sin without the fear of staining our robe of righteousness.

Those who knowingly and willingly rush headlong into sin are as foolish as the fireman who sheds his fire jacket because “it’s too hot to fight a fire in that thing.” No! He better keep that jacket on or it’s going to get a lot hotter when he steps into the flames.

While God’s love is forever, it can also be forsaken, and those who forsake His love will be forbidden entrance into heaven. But why would we want to do that? His love has given you peace and joy. I mean if God sent His Son to die for you, is He going to forget about you now?

Would you spend considerable time, effort, and money restoring an antique, hand-carved cabinet to its original condition only to leave it out in the driveway where it will get ruined by the snow and rain and summer sun. Of course not! That’s what Paul was getting to when he wrote: “For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” So if God loves us so much, why does He let us suffer?

God often lights the fire of adversity to melt our self-sufficiency. Only then can we be molded into God’s likeness the way we can mold soft wax with your fingers.

That’s not to say that every time adversity comes our way it’s because we’ve been proud and need a call to repentance. God often lets us suffer because He wants to show off His grace.

Just as a burning candle will fill a room with a pleasing scent, Christians facing the fire of adversity will give off the aroma of Christ when they turn to their Savior’s love and grace to get them through.

The citizens of Nacozari were so thankful to Jesús García for saving them that they renamed their town after him. Jerusalem, however, was not renamed Jesusville in honor of the Savior’s sacrifice on Good Friday. But you, dear listener, have been renamed.

We were once God’s enemies but thanks to Jesus, we are now part of God’s family. This change is not just honorary. You really have peace with God. You

really have a reason to rejoice. Why? Because God's amazing love is for you, and it's forever. That's the world's greatest rescue. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen