

Redeeming the Coronavirus
John 20:1-18
Romans 8:22-25, 28
Sunday, April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

Redemption? What does that mean? It's a pretty theological term isn't it?

According to Oxford Dictionary, redemption means the act of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil. It also means the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for a payment or clearing a debt.

How does Christ's death on the cross become an act of redemption then?

We are all sinners. None of us is fit for the kingdom of heaven because we aren't holy or loving enough. As faithful followers of Jesus Christ, though, we can acknowledge our sinful ways, confess, repent and move into new ways of living empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is redemption. It's the first step in our life's journey of transformations and sanctification.

Christ's death on the cross, was the eternal sacrifice for every sin we have ever made. Prior to his life and death, believers had to sacrifice animals or grain to be freed or redeemed from their sin. Yet, God saw how inconsequential that practice was in altering people's behaviors and attitudes. Those animal and grain sacrifices had become pretty much meaningless to the Jews in Jesus' days.

Redemption means that one is saved from sin or evil; that one gains possession of something in exchange for payment or something valuable.

For Christians, we are saved from the sin and we gain our relationship with God by surrendering our life. That's redemption in the grandest, God-scheme of life.

Redemption is something God does. Now because God is good and gracious, God can and will use human beings as means of bringing about redemption into life. We can become vessels of God's redemptive power in another person's life. That's what the passage from Romans is talking about. Hear verse 28 again:

"...We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The best example I can give of this, are the counselors who work with addicts. They help free addicts from the scourge that is stealing all the good from their lives. They are helping people rebuild new lives. It's not an easy process for either the counselor not the recovering addict.

But for us this Easter, redemption can and will be a new experience for all of us. The coronavirus is impacting our lives in some really significant ways and there could be some terrible things ahead before life gets better.

What good can God bring out of our current situation? God can do amazing, miraculous things.

We are talking about the Almighty One who brought Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground with a wall of water on both sides of them.

We are talking about the True God who started a fire on logs which were completely soaked with water.

We are talking about a God who brought Israel back from exile into the Promised Land and helped them rebuild the Temple.

We are talking about the Holy One who kept Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego alive in a blazing fiery furnace.

We are talking about the same God whose Son walked across water, healed hundreds and thousands of people who were sick, lame, paralyzed.

We are talking about the God who rose a little girl from death, a boy in a casket in a funeral procession, and Lazarus.

This is the God we worship. God can and does all kinds of amazing miraculous things. So God could wipe out the coronavirus at any time. God could provide a vaccine at any time. We have an amazing God who can choose to do these things. So why doesn't God do this? Doesn't God love us enough to care for us and wipe out this disease?

Yes, I believe that God does care about us enough to wipe out the disease. The real question is how is God going to show his love for us in the face of this disease and all the consequences that are developing because of it? Is wiping out the disease, the only thing God can do right now to show his love for us? Are we blind to all the ways that God already shows his love to us?

How can God redeem the coronavirus pandemic? There are grand, global ways God is at work. But what about for us right here in Belle Fourche? We are feeling the impacts even though no one in our county that has been diagnosed with the virus.

When Dale and I were living in Grand Forks AFB in the spring of 1997, the Flood of the Century hit. The Red River busted through its banks for hundreds of miles, all the way to Winnipeg Canada. The entire Red River Valley on both sides, Minnesota and North Dakota were severely impacted by the disaster.

I saw an amazing army of goodness in the midst of that disaster. So many generous, caring, hard-working, resourceful people coming to help redeem the awful situation. I saw organizations like the Salvation Army, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission and the United

Methodist Committee on Relief do amazing ministry work in the region helping to rebuild. They were there not for weeks, but for months and months.

Yet, in the midst of all the hard work, the grungy disgusting work...something else came out of the Flood. Something that would help restore spirits, something that helped begin the healing process, something that inspired people to dream and plan for the future.

What was that special thing that God did, that did all of that? God helped some musicians and writers come together to create a musical called Keep the Faith. This musical became the Summer Performing Arts (SPA) project for the kids in the Grand Forks community to get involved in.

Connie Sherwood, a member of Zion UMC, is the director for the Senior High production of the SPA programs. She's been involved in that role for over 25 years. She worked with Dan Pederson and Mike Weber to write the script from radio transcripts. They sought help from local musicians to write songs as well. Connie believes that God's Spirit was very much a part of the creating process that summer as they wrote the script and songs. Jesus after all, had taught his disciples not to fear physical death, but rather to fear what can kill the spirit and the body. (Matthew 10:28)

As the teens learned the music and lines, practiced the choreography, they began to process their grief and the changes they were dealing with. They could express the horror of Blizzard Hannah, now several months behind them with a sense of victory.

They turned common phrases into catchy song titles like: The Sump Pump Blues, Sandbag Stomp, and Berm Envy!

They employed all kinds of music styles from winsome sad ballads like "I'll Smile Too" to a rap song entitled "River City Rap". There was even a song in Billy Joel's style found in the song "I Didn't Start the Fire" that was called "The Big, Big Flood" where every stanza enumerated lists of events that happened during flood and the recovery.

But the best thing about this production was that it was faith-based, as you can see from the title! Scripture passages that helped the kids cope and overcome were woven into the music. That's what made a huge difference for the community.

The youth put on the show nine times to sell out crowds over the course of that year.

A lot of good things came out of that experience for people. The youth testified in their songs that they were stronger after this. They had an inner strength they didn't realize they could tap into. We see that inner strength as coming from God and the Holy Spirit, using them to redeem the situation and bring new life to the community.

I share this, because sometimes when we think about redemption, we put it in physical terms. Let's remember that God's redeeming work is actually a lot more personal and spiritual. It is meant to help each of us experience God in new ways, maybe even finding that inner strength that can come only from him. God can use every one of us in some way to redeem

this situation, but let's keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open for the story-tellers who can help us move through it, and overcome it with a sense of victory.

That's why God rose Jesus from the grave folks. So that we could believe that God can overcome death, even death of his very own Son, on the cross. God can and will redeem this coronavirus pandemic. We just need to have the eyes to see him at work, ears to hear him at work, and hearts and hands to follow him into the work.