

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, September 24, 2023

"Moravian Essentials: God the Son as Redeemer"

"Young at Heart" Message

Who here can give me directions to the washroom in the church?

Can anyone who went to my house for the potluck give us specific directions to get there?

OK, now, I'm new to Calgary. Can anyone give me specific directions to get to Calgary Olympic Park from here?

Alright, lastly, who can give me specific instructions on how to get from here to Wisconsin so I can go visit family?

Now, imagine if, when I asked you for directions, your response was simply "you know the way." I would admit to thinking "wow, what an unhelpful answer. Good thing I have GPS!"

Unfortunately for Jesus's disciples, I don't think they had GPS back then. So, when they tell Jesus that they don't even know where he is going, let alone how to get there, and Jesus responds with "you know the way," it can sound a little bit snarky if we think about it from our context.

Now of course I was being a little silly when I said they didn't have GPS back in Jesus's day. But, even if GPS did exist in the first century, Jesus wasn't talking about a physical location that could be found using GPS anyway.

Jesus was talking about something much deeper than that. Jesus was talking about salvation, or redemption.

The Message

Today, we are talking about God as redeemer, or Saviour. The second Moravian essential is God redeems, or God saves. This is a tough one to talk about. Not because it's an emotionally triggering topic, but because it's a difficult topic to explain in a way that people will understand. But, Jesus actually explains pretty well in the John passage we heard earlier. Jesus says we already know the way - we already know how to understand redemption.

We already know, because HE is the way. He is the way to redemption, or salvation. He says, "without me, no one can go to the Father."

Without Jesus, no one is saved. In other words, we cannot bring about salvation on our own. And, we certainly can not predict or dictate the salvation of others. God saves souls, we do not. Even pastors don't save souls - not really. Our ordination vows say that we are committed to caring for souls - not saving them.

Too many Christians spend too much time telling the rest of the world what they can or can't do to be saved. I drove past a billboard the other day that said something to the effect of "need salvation? We can help."

Now, maybe whoever placed the billboard there was genuinely just looking to be a messenger of the good news - to be the GPS if you will to reaching Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Maybe they were only looking to care for souls, and not seeking to try to "save" souls on their own.

But, often well-meaning Christians believe that *they* have all the answers for saving people. However, Jesus says it clearly - "I am the way." Jesus is the path to salvation. Nothing we humans can say or do will change that, as much as we occasionally like to think we get to dictate who is saved and who isn't.

I'm not sure how many of you who were not born into the Moravian Church know who Count Zinzendorf was, but he brought about the revival of the Moravian Church in Herrnhut, Germany. He came from a Lutheran background, but in 1737 he was consecrated a bishop of the Moravian Church and became the major theologian and leader of the renewed Moravian Church.

I bring him up to specifically talk about his Religion of the Heart, but first it is important to note that Zinzendorf emphasized that Christ played an active role in God's plan of salvation, as expressed in John 3:16. This passage, famously, says "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In other words, a true understanding of God as loving father comes through Jesus Christ.

Zinzendorf lived in the time of the Enlightenment, when philosophers began to question the truth of Christianity in the name of reason. Essentially, they argued that you cannot believe what you cannot understand and cannot reason. This was a very intellectual view of religion, but Zinzendorf offered an alternative.

He argued that the Christian faith is something different than a rational system of knowledge about God. It is a living relationship with Christ. He also recognized that there are differences in how people experience Christ. And this is the part I resonate with the most - he believed that every person has a unique faith journey, and Christ is leading everyone according to their individual character and needs.

Thus, for example, one person may experience a sudden awakening, while another person experiences the deepening of faith as a slow and gradual development.

I am one who has experienced this slow and gradual development of faith. And ultimately, because of these differences, Zinzendorf encouraged people to pay attention to the movement of Christ in their heart and, importantly, to share those personal experiences with others.

All of that is to say that redemption is grace. It is a gift from God. It is not something we earn and it's definitely not something we can bestow upon others. It is given freely by a loving God who sent his son Jesus Christ to show us the way to God. Jesus is, for lack of a better metaphor, our GPS for salvation.

The One who created us is also the One who saves us out of love for us. If you recall in our introduction to this series that I said love is *action*. Not an emotion.

God's action - God's act of creation and God's act of sending his Son - is what provides for our salvation. This is the entire message of the Gospels when it comes down to it.

But, here is the important thing for us to remember: We Christians, we Moravians, are not the only ones who are redeemed. Redemption - grace - is not just reserved for us.

If we proclaim "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the *sin of the world*," we cannot reserve salvation for just our little pocket of the world. We must reserve it for *everyone*.

And this, honestly, is what can make it hard to be Christian sometimes. Because if we believe we are redeemed - if we believe the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world - we must believe it applies to everyone equally.

We cannot just put up our sign that says "reserved" and hope someone unexpected doesn't sit there. We cannot hold a place in line for only people we deem worthy, preventing anyone else from getting into the queue. We cannot reserve salvation for only those we deem the righteous, religious, spiritual elite.

Redemption is not just for the righteous. Jesus did not come only for the chosen few. A few weeks ago, we saw Jesus expand his definition of who was included in his grace in the story of the Canaanite woman. Jesus came to save *all of us*.

Jesus redeems all of us. Even those we fundamentally disagree with. Even those who rub us the wrong way. Even those who have done evil things in their lives. Even those who live their lives very differently than we do.

Jesus redeems *everyone*.

We must believe this applies to everyone equally. And it can be very difficult to understand this when we look at our enemies. It can be difficult to feel any love toward someone who has hurt us, or who has hurt others. It can be very difficult to love someone who has committed horrible crimes toward other people.

And yes, we are told to love our enemies and to put that love into action. But, we are also redeemed even if we cannot extend our love to certain people. The good news, of course, is that even if our human minds and hearts cannot muster up that kind of unconditional love, Jesus can. Jesus saves everyone. Even if we don't fully understand how or why, Jesus has shown us the way. It is up to us to see his example as guidance on our path.

If we truly believe in God as redeemer through Jesus Christ, then we can open ourselves up to love others with the kind of love that God has shown in redemption. It is not our concern or our worry to determine whether or not other people are saved. It is only our concern to demonstrate love in action. Jesus is the way to redemption, so we can learn to live fully into God's purpose for us - to demonstrate love for ourselves and our neighbours, our communities, and the world. Amen.

Let us pray: Redeeming God, we are so grateful that you sent your son Jesus Christ to save us. We are especially grateful that the burden of determining who is saved is Your job, and not ours. It allows us to expand our definition of love in ways we may not have considered otherwise. May we accept your gift of salvation and grace, may we be gentle with ourselves and with others, and may we live fully into the beauty of difference in humankind. All of this we pray in Your name. Amen.