

Sunday, March 22, 2020 – Facebook Devotional

Good morning everybody and welcome to Sunday scripture session with Pastor Sandi. I challenge you now all to try and say that three times real fast! Today we are going to share some prayer requests before we get started because there's a lot of folks that need prayer.

We had someone call to tell us about a teenager who was in need of a transplant. Betty Schiller's in a nursing home, and she fell and she cracked her hip. And then, Ethel, Miss Throat's sister, is also in a nursing home and recovering from pneumonia and MRSA, both of those nursing homes are on lockdown and we know that there is danger in some of the nursing homes that are on lockdown too, just simply because of what's going on in our world.

Grant Martin called last night, and we want to remember to pray for Grant in the loss of his friends. Linda Urban, and her husband have been ill so we want to request prayer for them as well. And then I'd like to ask you to pray for a young lady named Faith. She is a new mommy and she has a two month old little girl. And she's really struggling to get life on the path that she would really like to see it on so she needs our prayer.

Of course, we're in the midst of social distancing, and trying to avoid the Corona Virus in our own lives, and so we need to pray for each other and lift each other up and support each other in that. We also need to still be a support for our communities. And so there are things that the church, because they are the church, does for our community so we need to pray that we stay safe in those circumstances as well. While we minister to people who truly do need not just food, but Jesus as well.

And we need to pray for our school kids who are starting another week out of school. And it looks like they may be out of school for a long time. It's easy for kids to get bored. Well, it's easy for all of us to get bored. And so, let's pray for the wisdom to know how to help our kids, and to be patient with them as they do their school assignments and things like that. A lot of them do not understand what's happening in our world and so it makes it very stressful for them as well.

And then of course we need to pray for all of us. I would ask that you pray for Ion. We received word yesterday that Thailand has recalled all of its exchange students from around the world and so Ion will likely be headed home sometime soon. We believe this week we're just waiting on the agents to get the tickets and get his final doctor's permission to travel and then he will be heading back to Thailand, which saddens all of us, so please keep him in prayer, as well. And pray for his family in Thailand who have missed him for a long while, and it's good for them that he's coming home but at the same time we want to pray for their safety as well.

Lord, we come to you this morning and we thank you for this opportunity to gather on a sunny Sunday morning, in a very cold week in March, and to be in your presence. We thank you for the protection and the provision that you have given us as we walk through this season of uncertainty. And Father, we ask that hearing our prayers, you will touch lives and you will touch bodies, and you will touch souls and you would help them come to the realization that you are their defense and their protector and their provider. Father, we pray for all the situations that we just mentioned.

We ask Lord that you bring comfort to those who have experienced loss, that you help us all through this season, that you keep our eyes focused on you and our hearts in tune with you so that we cannot become so frightened and dismayed that we join the rest of the world and panic.

Father, we ask that you would heal injured and sick bodies, and that you truly would come alongside those who are experiencing any kind of loss from the situation caused by this virus. Father that you would protect all these exchange students that are heading back to Thailand and other countries around the world, and their families. And that you would sooth their sorrow at leaving behind their host families and their friends, and you would just continue to guide them and direct them wherever they may be. And we pray for those families who are putting their exchange students on planes this week. And we ask Lord, that you sooth their worries over travel and sooth their sense of loss, that you help them to stay in touch with their kids. And that you can always provide for them as well and we thank you for them, because it is a totally different experience but a wonderful experience. And they too, need your comfort.

Father, we pray for those who are in a situation where their lives and health are compromised by Corona Virus and we ask Lord that you bring about a supernatural healing in the lives of those who are struggling.

In all things, we give you honor. We give you glory because of your love for us and we ask all these things In Jesus name, amen.

Now, normally, as a part of the service following our prayer time, we usually do tithes and offerings. Well, obviously we're not doing tithes and offerings this morning. And I know some of you have questions, so please feel free to mail any tithes or offerings into the church. Nelson United Methodist Church at Post Office Box 210, Garrettsville, Ohio, 44231. That mail is being checked regularly and your tithes and your offerings will be processed as always.

It's important to maintain all of our spiritual disciplines, the disciplines of prayer and worship, the disciplines of sacrifice and the disciplines of giving tithes and offering. Even though we're not at the building, the building still has to operate. It still has to have heat and water. We still have to be able to do such things as this. We still need to be able to reach out to our community. So when you give those things you truly are giving to the work of God in the world.

And it's not that the church only wants your money. We want you to experience fullness of life by participating in all the spiritual disciplines. But yes, in all honesty, we do need those funds to keep going, whether we're in the building or not, so we do appreciate your support and I want you to know that.

Now this morning. We are going to turn to Romans chapter three, and we'll be reading verses nine through the end of the chapter. So Romans chapter three verses nine through the end of the chapter. Now, Paul has been talking to the Romans, about sin. And there's a lot of confusion about God's judgment on sin, and how we are supposed to be overcomers rather than sitting around steeped in sin.

And Roman says this, "What then, are we better than they those others in the world. No, not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all understand. As it is written there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is none who does good. No, not one. Their throne is an open tomb with their tongue, they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps or snakes is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways and the way of peace, they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now you know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under

the law, and that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight for violent law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God, apart from the law is revealed. Being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, who God has set forth as a propitiation by his blood. True faith to demonstrate His righteousness, because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed to demonstrate that at the present time his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

This is the word of God for the people of God. And all God's people said Amen.

Well crosses are everywhere. They hang on chains around people's necks, they're tattooed on people's bodies. We're surrounded by crosses that are now decorated with artificial flowers along the side of the road where there's been an accidental death, they're lined up in cemeteries, they're on grave markers, they tower over churches, sometimes hiding the cell phone towers that lurk inside those towers. People love crosses for sentimental reasons, yet not everybody loves what the cross truly symbolizes; the shameful death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died for the sins of the world.

Now, the world is a broad term. So, let's get down to brass tacks this morning. Jesus died for our sinful deeds. For yours, and for mine. And that is precisely why a lot of people find the cross offense. They find the cross offensive because it was cruel, they find the cross offensive because it was bloody and they find the cross offensive because the cross forces us to look deeply into ourselves and admit that we are not perfect.

There was a man who questioned, and refused faith in Jesus Christ because he could not accept the sacrifice of the cross. Why was the cross necessary he asked, what did it accomplish? Okay, so God son dies on the cross and he's dead for a few hours, how does that forgive sin?

But the truth of the matter is, that people reject the cross because it causes us to look deeply into ourselves and forces us to admit that if God had to go to those lengths, in order to save us from our sin, then we truly must be desperate sinners indeed.

Now, it's the middle of Lent. And lent is not supposed to be an easy time. Many, many people around the world look at our seasons of lent and advent, both of which are supposed to be seasons of penitence, and they look at them and they consider them to be the fluff before the party. They are the 4 weeks getting ready before the Christmas party and we are all out shopping. They're the 4 weeks getting ready for Easter so we are contemplating where we are getting our Christmas dresses and Christmas suits and how cute our kids are gonna look all dressed up on Easter Sunday morning when they go to church and participate in the Easter egg hunt and sing in the children's choir, and then we all head home for our traditional ham dinner.

Well, we think a lot of this season of the year about the Easter bunnies that are hopping around in our yards and I always have to laugh at that because, really, the bunny doesn't bring eggs. And we have conditioned ourselves with these warm fuzzy thoughts of the Cadbury bunny and all those wonderful things that we do with our kids at Easter like we do at Christmas.

But in that sometimes we fail to miss the true meaning and the true meaning of Easter has nothing to do with bunnies and nothing to do with chocolate and nothing to do with frilly dresses and cute little red ties and a brand new set of high heels and a family picture in front of the house on Easter morning.

Instead, Easter is the celebration of the final victory. If we were to read the Old Testament to look back into the books of Leviticus that talks about sacrifice. God required animal sacrifices to cover over sin. And the truth is, it did cover over sin, but it never forgave sin. The sins of the people were placed on the head of the pascal lamb, the lamb that would be sacrificed. And that blood would atone for sin. It would temporarily put the people at one with God. That's really what atonement means, not that we would just wipe away everything but that we are finally at one. It is at-one-ment with God.

But the truth of the matter is, we're all human. And we know that it doesn't take us long to do something again that is wrong. We can say we're sorry to God and to other people in one minute, and five minutes later, we're griping and complaining about something that somebody said or did. We are in a mean spirited moment where we will say anything, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

It's said that we as human beings do that. But it is a part of a sinful nature. So what does God do about it? Well a lot of the world wants to think that God loves us so much that He will just simply look at it, laugh and shake his head because, after all, isn't his business to forgive us. We think that he should be quick to just cover over everything that causes damage to our own souls as well as the souls of others. But that's not true. There has to be a way to be forgiven and there has to be a way to proceed from that moment of forgiveness into a better life, a stronger relationship with God that allows us to avoid sin.

Now, when I was in high school, I played basketball. Yes, little five foot three inch me. But there was one thing I couldn't do. I couldn't dunk a basket. Not because I didn't have the talent to dunk a basket, but because I couldn't reach that high. I lacked the height, and the strength to do that. That's one kind of can't.

There's another kind of can't. If you asked me to beat up your brother or sister that you're mad at I'm gonna say I can't. Now I might be big enough and I might be strong enough to do that but my character doesn't allow me to do that. And that's the other kind of can't that we talk about when we talk about God's power to forgive.

Because God who created the world set things in order and he also gave us not rules, and definitely not suggestions. He gave us commandments to live by that he knew would cause us to live pure lives in the world around us and to be witnesses for him and he also knew that those very rules would protect us from harm.

The Bible tells us that God is all powerful in the way that he responds to sin and he does instill unavoidable consequence. What if God were all forgiving, as people assume he is or should be. What if God automatically forgave every sin that was committed?

A missionary was talking with a young African man, about his promiscuous lifestyle and the young man justified his actions by saying that where he came from a married man could have as many mistresses he wanted. But if a wife was unfaithful she should be put to death. Well the missionary reminded the young man that he had gone to a Christian school there in Africa and that God does not hold a double standard. And the young man said, "Yes, God is good. He is bound to forgive us. That is his job."

Well does God really have a job like that? Should God just simply forgive without requiring his people to consider what they do and what they've done to others, how much harm has been created? If that were the case, what about the victims of their sin?

It makes absolutely no sense to think that a just and merciful God can just say, "Oh, it's okay, I understand." And let us go on our merry way without ever considering the root cause of the sin or ever considering the damage that has been done because of it. That is not what the Bible teaches; that is what makes us comfortable. But that is not the case. Sin is a desperate situation in our lives from the beginning to end.

Sin is the thing that we fear the most and we don't like to talk about it. And here in the middle of lent. I'm going to talk about it because it's important that we come to understand that God cannot allow people to balance out their sin by just saying I'm sorry and walking away. Can God allow people to balance out sin by doing good things?

Some people think that God judges people with a balance in his hand. The bad goes on one side and the good goes on the other. If the good is more than the bad then they think God will be satisfied. Some think they can balance out their sins by going to church, by doing good deeds, by giving money to help others or maybe accomplishing something for the kingdom. Some think that they can get credit for being really sorry for their sins. But the truth of the matter is, just like anyone else in the world, most of the time we're sorry that we got caught. Some try to balance out their sins by making amends for things. They give back what they've taken dishonestly, they try to write what they've said about somebody, they try to make up to the person that they've hurt. If they've offended god they try to do an act of penance, maybe some prayer or some act of self-denial, that will balance God's scale. They think that if they do those things God will be bound to forgive their stumbles along the way.

Then in Romans, Paul writes to Jews who also had that idea about if they did their best to keep the commandments, the law, they thought that God would understand and not bother with their sins. Paul said, "Well, I'm going to be pretty harsh. God doesn't show favoritism to self-righteous people, nor does he show favoritism to those who choose sin and are unrighteous."

We read that passage this morning and it was very easy to see that God had a lot of harsh things to say about people who chose to sin. A blanket pardon folks, does justice, but it undermines God's justice. It undermines His mercy. So, tolerating the sin, and especially a world full of sin, falls short of the life that God has chosen for us. A life that is glorious, and full of joy and peace. We cannot have those things if God tolerates sin, or if we do.

God has to condemn a sin. He has to condemn the actions of those who choose it. And it doesn't matter whether it's simply about taking a cookie out of a cookie jar behind mommy's back, or judging somebody that we know who isn't as perfect as we are, or shaking our heads behind the backs of

somebody in church or stealing a car or committing a murder. It doesn't matter because sin is sin, regardless.

Now, God has to condemn the sin and he has to condemn the sinner, but the solution is unacceptable to a loving God, because God's love demands not only justice, it demands mercy and grace for sinners. How does that love and justice coexist? Well God, justifies us. He chooses to look at us. And he chooses to love us regardless of what we've done, but you have to understand that he pains his heart.

God's solution is a sacrifice that brings about at-one-ment. In the Old Testament, it was those animals but those animals were the precursor of Jesus. They were the prophetic symbol of the sacrifice, of the cross. Blood was spilled then in order to cover over sin. Jesus' blood was spilled to wash away sin. It is impossible.

Hebrews 10, 1 through 10 tells us, "for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once and for all." Romans 10, or Hebrews 10:10, I'm sorry, talks to us about how those sacrifices, those animal sacrifices happen year, after year after year after year.

And it covered over sin for a short time until the people got themselves further into trouble, but it never once totally removed it or gave them the power to turn away from sin on their own. The animal sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus was not like a lamb. He was the one and only Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus Christ the righteous one, the only Righteous One made that sacrifice for sin and not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world.

It has to be accepted. But it has to be more than accepted, it has to be understood. And it has to be appropriated.

Our God gave us an amazing gift in the cross. The death of Jesus on the cross was a cosmic event and by that I meant it was not limited just to earth it affected the whole universe. It was not limited by space and time. All creatures. All creatures in all times and places watched in amazement as God Himself made a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of humanity. His people that he loved so much that he would give up his only son. But sacrifice is sufficient for all sins for all people in all times. And in all places.

God's righteousness is what makes us right, we as human beings like to try to justify ourselves. We're self-righteous. We try to build ourselves up, usually by putting others down. Some try to live up to a high standard. Perhaps the law of God, and sometimes by a personal moral code. Some are careful to meet the expectations of other people. Some try to meet the expectations of the community in which they live and some others still try to build themselves up by looking good in the community.

But all of that is wasted time and energy if we do not do it under the power, and for the sake of the Cross. Righteousness is a gift. All are justified or made right with God, freely, by God's grace, which is also a gift, through the redemption that came from the cross, the sacrifice of Jesus. In Romans, it is accepting God's righteousness. The atomic sacrifice of Jesus as our way of righteousness. That is faith. Un-faith is to not deny Christ's sacrifice of atonement was even necessary because we think we're good Enough. Folks, there's only one who is good enough.

So today, in the middle of lent, let's take a good look at ourselves. There is not a one of us, not a one, including pastors and teachers and rabbis and imams and other spiritual leaders who are 100% perfect.

The hope of our salvation is that we appropriate the gift of the cross. And the purpose of the cross. Is this atonement. This ability to live righteously before God.

It is not meeting our own expectations; it's not measuring up to the expectations of the others. It's not relying on other people to pat us on the back and tell us how good we are, it's not being assured of our own goodness and striving day in and day out and beating ourselves up because we fail, and then trying again under our own steam. It's about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the power that comes through it.

Romans 1:17 summarizes in the gospel, the good news of Christ in the cross. The righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written the righteous will live by faith. If we accept what Jesus did for us on the cross and we trust in His atoning sacrifice. We are justified and made right with God.

Then we are responsible to obey, and to follow. And we will talk about those items next week. But for today. Remember that faith is trust and acceptance. It is trusting God's righteous judgment and his grace and accepting God's gift of a righteous life. Faith, in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the way to forgiveness of our sin.

It is a way to get right with God, the only way. And it's the way to get on the right path. The only way. In this life, it opens up the way to becoming more and more righteous as we follow Christ and we reflect God's glory in our lives. And at the end of this life, it opens the door to life that is everlasting. That is totally right. Just as it should be. And all we have to do is choose God's way of righteousness, rather than depending on ourselves and our own goodness, rather than depending on some other way.

Thank you for listening in this morning and we pray that you will have a blessed week. Continue to tune in, we will keep you informed of what's happening by phone, and emails and letters. At present we are indefinitely suspended from in person worship but we will continue to worship and pray together as a family here. And as we talk to each other on the phone and, as we gather together in little groups, perhaps on Zoom for bible study.

We love you. And we pray God's richest blessings upon you. Today, enjoy the sunshine stay safe. Stay healthy.

Bye for now.