

Sunday March 13, 2022 Lent 12 Tilted Halos

2 Timothy 2:8-13 Luke 18:9-14

Just close your eyes for a moment wherever you are—whether in the sanctuary here at Glenwood, in your living room, bedroom or kitchen or even in your workplace- just pause for a moment. Now imagine yourself looking at yourself in the mirror. What does your reflection say to you besides how much weight you've lost or gained, that your hair is getting long or nice haircut. What about the clothes you are wearing? Are they flattering to you? Do they express how you feel with bright colours or dark colours for warmth? Just what does what you wear reflect who you are?

A few weeks ago we explored what it meant to put on the armor of God—and dressed up Gregory to prepare for battle. We were reminded of what we needed to stand our ground and to firmly stand in faith. According to Ephesians 6 (10-18) we need to have the belt of truth buckled around your waist, the breastplate of righteousness in place and our feet fitted with readiness which comes from peace. We are to hold onto the shield of faith in one hand and the sword of the Spirit in the other. We are also to have the helmet of salvation on our heads. This is the armor of God. But we do not live with this threat of endangerment or being tested for our faith as we live here in Canada, do we? Have you ever been asked about your faith and you felt you needed that extra armor on top of your body? Just what do we need to experience and grow in our faith so that we may be in a closer relationship with Christ Jesus?

A man walked into his doctor's office who was a Christian leader in their church and said, "Doctor I have this awful headache that never leaves me. Could you give me something for it?"

"I will," said the doctor, "but I want to check a few things out first. Tell me, do you drink a lot of liquor?"

Do you drink much liquor? -- never touch the stuff.

Do you smoke? I think it is terrible-- I've never smoked.

Are you and your wife strong in your relationship? Yes sir and as we get older we sleep even better?

Do you support your church and church family? Always like clock work and we enjoy seeing our church family and worship time too.

“Tell me” said the doctor, “the pain in the head you speak of is it a sharp, shooting kind of pain?”

“Yes, that’s it- sharp shooting kind of pain all around my head.”

“Simple my friend, your trouble is you have your halo on too tight. Just tilt your head a little and loosen up!. Your ideals have caused you to forget what Jesus did for you. You don’t have to be crucified like he was—just believe and follow his way and relax, there is no need to fear. For you have put on Christ.”

As we reflect upon our lives as faithful followers of Jesus, we are growing in faith and in relationship with Jesus. We seek perfection like angels yet we are not angels nor will we ever be. God created us as separate unique beings, but we do not need to die like Christ. The tilted halos we as Christians wear are shining because we have received God’s grace. God’s grace enables us to live and love others as Jesus taught. But it because Jesus died that we might receive eternal life. As sinners we are saved by this precious gift of grace. But why did Jesus die? Because God loved the world. God loved the world so much that he gave Jesus to die. If everyone believes in him, there is no death but eternal life. God loves us and all he asks us to do is trust him.

If we are to live by grace, we need to trust in Jesus and follow his teachings which he shared prior to his death and resurrection. We need to grow in our knowledge of God and to want a strong relationship with him but we must also do what God asks- read pray act in faith and with hope.

Paul writing from prison teaches Timothy what it means to be faithful to Jesus and reminds him of his convictions. Paul’s faith is so strong that he tells him that he will endure everything for the sake of others so that they will obtain the salvation of Christ. And then Paul states what we should remember about a relationship with God noting that God will still want this relationship no matter whether we pull away or get lost. :

The saying is sure- if we have died with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure we will also reign with him

Ife we deny him, he will also deny us

If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

How do we start this relationship with Christ Jesus? How do we get closer to God? The simple answer is look to God and he will answer. Speak his name and God will hear your praise and prayer.

Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to get the point across that all may come to God the Father but not all will receive God's grace in the same way or moment. The Pharisee and the tax collector went into the temple to pray. Each believed in God and prayed but in different ways. The Pharisee was standing alone and spoke loudly- God I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. He then said what he did do—fasted twice per week, and gave a tenth of all his income to the temple. But, it was the tax collector who prayed with humility. As a businessman who collected taxes he was thought to be a sinner for cheating others out of their money.

The tax collector stood far off and was beating his breast as he said, God be merciful to me, a sinner.” He knew his place with God- a sinner, and the need for forgiveness. He asked for mercy from God. And it is Jesus’ statement that pushes the message home—It is this man who went home justified for he prayed and sought forgiveness.

We look at the people in the headlines today- who are the ones exalting themselves and who are heeding the message of humility? And who amongst us present here or wherever you are sitting and listening are we humbling ourselves before God seeking His grace and mercy?

Each person must be ready to understand this gift from God. Each of us are called to sing of the everyday mystery of our relationship with God and not always looking for the obscure. We are to trust God and to believe that God loves us and forgives us. God will never let us go. So we should trust him with our lives. This is knowing that we have received God's grace and acting upon it by telling others what a difference God has made in our lives because of His love given in Jesus. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection we can have hope that renews itself in us. Because of Jesus' resurrection there is hope for life on earth and life beyond our physical death. This life is eternal and given through God's grace.

Who are you as you look on your reflection in the mirror? The humble tax collector seeking forgiveness and mercy? The too tight halo wearer not sure what life is about without God's grace? The Pharisee going through the motions of praying but unsure of the relationship he has with God? or maybe you are just yourself and discerning who you are in light of God's love for you and what it means for your daily living because you have been blessed by God. And you have received God's gift of grace. But don't hold on to it—share it with others.

For this gift needs to be passed on to others and through faith this is our task as Christ's followers. Let us remember this as we adjust our halos from time to time and look to the one who created us, loved us and loves us still.

Let us pray: God of grace. Thank you for your gift of love to us in Jesus. We humble ourselves before you as we give you the glory you deserve. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.

Let us sing the words of God's promise to us all as found in John 3 :16

"For God so loved the world.."