

15 March 2020—Lent 3: Romans 5:1-11

In the latter half of today's reading from Romans, Paul sums up God's nature, Christ's redemption, and our salvation. In verse 6 he writes: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*; verse 8: *God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us*; and verse 10: *For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life*. Throughout the New Testament similar verses echo the truth of God's astounding love.

However, for many such assumptions about God and humanity are unfamiliar. Take assumptions about what it means to be a human being. The jazz musician Charlie Mingus once said in an interview: "...I (try) to play the truth of who I am. The problem is that I'm changing all the time." The notion that we have no core of personhood is widespread. The philosopher Rene Descartes wrote 'I think, therefore I am.' We take it a step further, assuming the core of human personhood is fluid, ever-changing.

The truth about humanity taught in the Bible and Christian Tradition is much different. There *is* a constant core of being essential to human personhood but, unlike Descartes, the core of personhood is not 'I think, therefore I am,' but 'I am loved, therefore I am'. And this core is solid, unchanging. *If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation*, writes Paul. *For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...*, we read in John's Gospel (3:16). Jesus said: *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love* (John 15:9). Our constant core of being is God's love. We are not merely God's creation. One can make without deep involvement. I spent college summers as a short-order cook. I cannot admit to loving the sandwiches or having affection for those who benefitted from my 'handiwork.' God loves what love creates. Every person is God's beloved, someone for whom God yearns.

God's love is not conditional on our actions: while we are weak, are sinners, are enemies God loves us. God's love is not contingent. God does not love us more when we are good and less when we are bad. God yearns for us to receive His love that He may yet embrace us ever more deeply with love. God's deepest desire is that we desire Him.

What a difference this view of humanity makes. We need not be afraid of God's judgment nor hide our sins. God, fully aware of your sins, loves you. Yet we can delude ourselves that we have nothing for which to be forgiven, or we go to another extreme making a self-obsessed drama of ourselves—every sin is huge, every fault unforgiveable. The fantasy of sin amnesia and the delusion of sin sensationalism come from pride. Pride draws us away from the true source of Being because we cannot save ourselves.

Accepting God's love makes us more fully human. Receiving God's love heals us. Sin destroys our ability to be loved and love in return. Sinners are not just morally bad, sin dehumanizes. The cure is to offer our sins to God for love's sake. The result is re-creation as knowing recipients of God's love, through which we reciprocate and share God's love.

A second important difference is this: love is the basis of knowing. Traditionally Christians have held that truth—whether great Truths or lesser truths—can only be known in relationship. Truth is not simply what each person decides. One cannot, as it were, stand outside that which one desires to know, but must enter the reality of what one desires to know. Knowing is only possible in relationship, and the ultimate relationship is love *because love is the core of God's Being*. In an encounter in which love is the medium one must both affirm the worth of the Other and possess a deep interest in being involved with the Other. This is precisely why the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is utterly essential to Christianity: God the Son became what we are, that we might become what He is. God, in His own ecstatic Being of love for all that God makes could not, as it were, restrain Himself but burst out into creation to break down every wall of separation. The Incarnation reveals God's irreducible Being as fathomless Love seeking relationship with us.

Sin is evil's daydream. Reality is the love of God for all. Sin dehumanizes us, deceiving into death. God's love makes us fully human, sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ of eternal life. There is an inescapable, ever-present choice, and we make it with our lives. We may choose whether to grow up to maturity, to the stature of the full measure of Christ, by accepting and sharing God love. Such is God's eternal desire for us. Amen.