

Pastor Andrew Gilliland  
Charing Cross Pastoral Charge – FB LIVE  
09 August 2020

Scripture: Psalm 85

Greetings everybody and good morning to you on this fine Sunday morning on the 09<sup>th</sup> day of August 2020. It is so wonderful to be finished my classes that I had for my study leave at the Atlantic School of Theology and I am very happy to be able to share a message with you once again via FB live. I had hopes that we might decide to meet in person in August, but I believe the plan, right now, is too worship together in person again on 06 September which is the Sunday of Labour Day weekend.

That might change as time goes on, but we do have a board meeting tomorrow night (Monday August 10) at 8PM where I know we will be discussing the plans to open up the church buildings for worship again. As always if you have any questions, any concerns or want to express your own view on these things please speak to myself or really anybody else who sits on the board. It is important for us to hear your voice as well even if you do not have a position on the board of either Charing Cross United Church or Wesley United Church. I will be sharing a message with you for 3 weeks in August, this week, next week the 16<sup>th</sup> of August and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August. I will be away again on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August and though I do not know who is filling in currently I have no doubt that the message will be fantastic. This morning I will be reading Psalm 85 so if you have your Bible available please open up to Psalm 85 as I will be reading that in a few moments.

Beyond August, like I said I hope we will be meeting in person again come September while still maintaining an online presence as we will have to limit the amount of people that can worship in person but we also recognize that not everybody will feel safe coming to the building and that is okay. What does this online presence look like though? I really have no idea, it could still be something like this done via FB and recorded live while I am preaching, or it could be recorded and uploaded after the fact. Either way we will make sure wherever you are that you can worship with us even if you cannot or do not want to be physically present.

Beyond that I do not think I have any other news or information to share except to say that I am back and would love to catch up with you and hear from you. I look forward to connecting with all of you again and am hopeful of what the future will bring. A reading from Psalm 85:

LORD, you have been kind to your land;  
you brought back the people of Jacob.

<sup>2</sup> You forgave the guilt of the people  
and covered all their sins.

<sup>3</sup> You stopped all your anger;  
you turned back from your strong anger.

<sup>4</sup> God our Savior, bring us back again.  
Stop being angry with us.

<sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you stay angry from now on?

<sup>6</sup> Won't you give us life again?  
Your people would rejoice in you.

<sup>7</sup> LORD, show us your love,  
and save us.

<sup>8</sup> I will listen to God the LORD.  
He has ordered peace for those who worship him.  
Don't let them go back to foolishness.

<sup>9</sup> God will soon save those who respect him,  
and his glory will be seen in our land.

<sup>10</sup> Love and truth belong to God's people;  
goodness and peace will be theirs.

<sup>11</sup> On earth people will be loyal to God,  
and God's goodness will shine down from heaven.

<sup>12</sup> The LORD will give his goodness,  
and the land will give its crops.

<sup>13</sup> Goodness will go before God  
and prepare the way for him.

Psalm 85 is described in the "NIV Application Commentary" as "one of the great prayers of human piety" found in the Psalms. Psalm 85 contains this strong awareness of sin and the need for forgiveness but also realizes that forgiveness and restoration can only be found as the result of the free gift of God's grace. Listen to some of those words again, verse 2: "You forgave the guilt of the people and covered all their sins." I think verses 4-7 really get to the crux of the matter:

<sup>4</sup> God our Savior, bring us back again.  
Stop being angry with us.

<sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you stay angry from now on?

<sup>6</sup> Won't you give us life again?  
 Your people would rejoice in you.  
<sup>7</sup> LORD, show us your love,  
 and save us.

I find this interesting dichotomy in this Psalm between God's love and God's anger or wrath but also in the concept of forgiveness. We are forgiven but we still constantly need forgiveness, we are restored and reconciled in a right relationship with God and yet we constantly require restoration and God's grace. These things are interesting tensions held within the words of this Psalm. I think a large part of this is our human inability to understand that God can be both loving and full of grace but also have anger and wrath.

To us those things are usually opposite, if you experience one, you must not be experiencing the other. I am not sure if this is true though because I know as a parent that sometimes you have to 'lay down the law' with your children, or maybe as a teacher or educator, perhaps even a nurse or doctor when dealing with others who simply refuse to listen would also experience this. Sometimes you have to be heard and often times it is when you want to keep somebody safe, especially a child. You never start with some form of anger but when you point out something nicely 10 times or ask for something to be done and it is still ignored and not done eventually you will take a different approach to get the thing that needs to be done completed. I know when I was in school if I was misbehaving it was a trip to the principals office and whenever somebody was called down, or sent to, that office the entire class let out this audible "oooooooo" as some sort of shaming for the person going to the office.

I was having a conversation just the other day and the person I was talking with told me that they were worried about believing in God and choosing to follow Christ and then failing. In other words, I think they were worried about not being good enough. The idea I think they had in their head was this idea of a God that is only angry and wrathful, and they would not want to fail at being a Christian. For me though, God has already accepted us, what we have trouble with is accepting that acceptance, and I think this is a result of sin. Over the summer I watched this comedy show that was on NBC but I was watching it on Netflix and it is called "The Good Place" the whole premise of the show is based on the idea of being good enough and getting enough points in your life to get into the good place.

Throughout the show (spoiler alert) the characters in the good place begin to realize that this place is not actually all that good and it has actually been designed

to be the bad place. The people that made it into the good place only made it because it therefore made it the bad place for each of them. As the show goes on though into other seasons something else is realized, nobody has been let into the good place in more than 500 years, life has become too complicated and no matter how good your actions might be, each action had this consequence of unknown actions that made the good act bad when the points were all added up.

In other words nobody was good enough to get into the good place, now that does not mean that they were bad enough for the bad place but in this show each action that a person made had all these unknown and unintended consequences to it and so at no fault of the person acting in what they believed was a good way they ended up practicing a bad action. This I found interesting as I watched the show because Biblically speaking, and I have said this in messages before, we are not good enough for the “good place” but we also are not bad enough for the “bad place.” We do not earn it, but it is by the Grace of God which is a free gift and that is what I find in the heart of this Psalm. It is a Psalm that celebrates God’s grace and our dependence on that grace. It is because of the grace of God that God turns away from righteous anger and continues in relationship with us.

Yet, as the conversation I had earlier this week about failing and not being good enough can attest too, we find it difficult to accept that we can’t bring anything to the table to earn, deserve or even lose God’s love for us. Generally we long to be good enough, we want to feel like we earned something, or had some say in the matter and yet God’s grace is offered to us unearned and unmerited, it is simply put a gift, a free gift, something we can only accept, not earn. For me, this all comes down to God loving us and therefore we do good, not we do good and therefore God loves us. God loves us and because of that love we seek to do good for others, live with respect in creation and share this message of good news we have in the hope of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Just yesterday my daily flip calendar put together by Max Lucado had these words:

Plunge a sponge into Lake Erie. Did you absorb every drop? Take a deep breath. Did you suck the oxygen out of the atmosphere? Pluck a pine needle from a tree in Yosemite. Did you deplete the forest of foliage? Watch an ocean wave crash against the beach. Will there never be another one? Of course there will. No sooner will one wave crash into the sand than another appears. Then another, Then another. This is a picture of God’s sufficient grace.

Let the grace of God wash over you, it is relentless like the ocean waves. Always present, always active, constantly happening. We all have trouble accepting it sometimes, I know I have trouble with the concept sometimes as well but God's grace is enough and as Psalm 85 says, God's goodness goes before us and God prepares the way.

Let's pray...

I do hope you enjoyed this message wherever you are and whenever you watched it. It is so great to be able to share a message with you again and I look forward to being able to share more and also for conversations to happen so shoot me an email, send me a text message, give me a call. I would love to hear from you and as I finish this just let me remind you that we in the church love you and that God also loves you and we look forward to sharing with you again. Cheers.