

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

“God’s gracious calling to eternal salvation through His Word” (Romans 9:10-11)

August 6, 2023

Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 10th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading, Romans 9:10-11.

“And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),”

So far the text...

The wheels of the plane bounced hard on the runway as it landed and then bounced again. The plane teetered back and forth as it tried to find its equilibrium while great braking forces were causing it to slow down. And then, there was a calm as everything stabilized and the plane gently rolled to the gate. And then, there was a spontaneous loud applause. Both landing in Orlando and on our way back to Brownsville, there was an applause.

Now, most flights that I’ve been on, there is never an applause. Seasoned travelers come to expect a safe landing because crashes are very rare. Your odds of being in a plane accident are 1 in 1.2 million and your survivability is 95%.

But, most likely, there were a lot of first-time travelers on the flights heading to Disney World from Brownsville. There were quite a few gasps and screams when the plane first took off. It’s certainly appropriate to applaud the pilots and crew for a safe trip. But, more importantly, of course, our applause and prayers of thanksgiving are always directed to God **“who will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;” Psalm 91:11.** Maybe some of those applauses were directed to God from any Christian travelers. For God alone always deserves all the glory as we entrust all our ways to His mercy and grace.

As Paul writes his letter to the Romans, he recounts how God chose Israel to be the special people entrusted with the gracious promises of His plan of salvation for the world. The Israelites were chosen by God to be the people from whom the Savior, Jesus Christ would come. And through His Word, God revealed His plan through the prophets. Paul would expect some applause from his kinsmen, the Jews.

But instead, there is much sadness in Paul's heart as he begins Romans chapter 9.

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.”

Paul has to tell the truth that's on his conscience and also because he is directed by the Holy Spirit to speak only the truth in Christ. What is causing him great sorrow? **“those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God;”**

The Jewish people were lavished with God's grace Paul says, but most of them rejected God.

“my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”

They were given all the special attention of God in the covenants, the temple worship, and most importantly the promise of the Messiah in Jesus Christ. Yet, they threw it all away and Paul knows that they are doomed to hell because of their rejection of Jesus. He loves his countrymen so much that he would even be willing to be accursed and go to hell if it meant that they could be saved. But, of course, one can't do this.

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”

Why? Why were the majority of Paul's countrymen lost and the Gentiles who were not God's chosen people now being saved? Paul supplies us with the clear answer at the end of chapter 9.

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written:

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**

That's the reason in a nutshell. If one pursues righteousness by the works of the law, one will fail...miserably...Jews, Gentiles, any of us. If we applaud ourselves, our supposed works of righteousness, as sufficient to gain entrance into heaven, we are very deluded.

Paul gives some very concrete examples in our epistle, doesn't he? Paul explains that the physical line of descent does not save, just because you were born a Jew. **“those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”** -children of the promise, not of the bondswoman Hagar. Children of the promise means children by faith, for Abraham believed and it was counted towards him for righteousness.

But not only this, Paul goes on... to show that it is by grace alone, God makes another promise to Rebekah, Isaac's wife. She is going to have twins, Esau and Jacob, but the older will serve the younger. Esau was born first and his was the birthright. His was the line of descent to the Messiah. But God chose Jacob, the younger, to be the line of descent to the Messiah. Of course, we know how Esau rejected his birthright and sold it for a bowl of soup. God rejected him. And God chose Jacob through Rebekah's urging to receive the blessing from his blind father, Isaac, using some animal skins to make it appear that he was Esau.

Both sons had the same father, Isaac. And before either had done any good or evil, before they were born, God chose the younger son, Jacob. What does this show?

Paul says clearly,

“that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls”

All the applause goes to God. It’s His work of salvation through Jacob’s descendent, Jesus, that has saved us. It is God’s gracious calling that chooses His people to be saved – our election.

Yes, this happened before we were born also. Do you believe in Jesus as your Savior? You can say “Yes, I believe!” because of God’s gracious calling to you through the hearing of His Word of promise, sealed in the gracious washing of your baptism. All the applause goes to God that you are here this morning – a child of God!

Do you want to know how great this mystery is? Listen to what Paul said to the Ephesians in chapter 1.

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Before even the world was created, you were predestined to be adopted as a son or daughter of Jesus! Yes! All praise of the glory of His grace!!!! Not our works, that He made us accepted in the Beloved.

God’s gracious election isn’t an arbitrary decision...I pick him and not him. No, we were chosen, “in Him”, through the means of grace, to know Jesus as our Savior and believe in Him.

We see God's amazing plan of salvation being carried out in time in our lives that His election of us is through the hearing of His Word and the giving of faith by the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what Paul continues to explain in Ephesians 1:

“7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ”

All applause to God who has revealed His saving will of redeeming us through Jesus' blood, forgiving our sins...again...according to the riches of His grace!

During my visit with family in Florida, I had the opportunity to spend some time with my uncle in Ocala and his fiancée. My uncle since his boyhood loved horses and his dream was to race thoroughbreds one day. God has blessed him with a beautiful horse farm and $\frac{3}{4}$ mile training track. One of his joys was watching one of his horses, Cross Traffic, win the Whitney stakes at the Belmont Park in 2013. It's a grade one stakes race that gives an automatic entry into the Breeders Cup. The winning horse also receives a blanket of roses which he has beautifully preserved and enclosed in his museum.

Now, Cross Traffic went on to sire other horses and one of them was racing yesterday in the Whitney Stakes, Maple Leaf Mel, owned by Bill Parcells. Maple Leaf Mel was trained by a stage 4 cancer survivor, Mel Giddings. And the horse was given her name. Maple Leaf Mel won her first 6 races and was the favorite to win at Saratoga yesterday. The filly had a good lead in the race in the stretch and looked like she would easily win her 7th race. But, a great sadness struck. With 2 meters left to go, she stumbled and broke her leg. Fortunately the jockey was not seriously injured, but Maple Leaf Mel had to be euthanized. What a sadness for all who worked with the horse and watched the race.

She was within strides of winning but stumbled and fell. With what sadness Paul began our chapter, thinking of the Jewish people who had rejected Jesus and stumbled and won't cross the finish line into heaven.

For God's elect, chosen, people, Jews and Gentiles alike, including you repentant child of God...though we stumble and sin in this world, God graciously picks us up, forgives us and makes this amazing promise to us in Philippians 1:6

“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”

By grace alone, God will carry you over the finish line and you will receive the crown of crowns, a blanket of roses, the victory in Jesus Christ! What an amazing truth this is! All glory and applause to God!!

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)