

Michael J. Mathey
Pentecost III A & Proper 6
June 14, 2026
Text: Romans 5:6 – 15
Title: What Do You Deserve?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. This past week the news cycle has included stories about the major sporting events going on right now, such as the NBA finals, the beginning of the FIFA World Cup, and – my personal interest – the NHL finals. The news has also been reporting regularly on the ongoing conflict with Iran, and while I was writing today's sermon the report was coming out that an end was in sight and an agreement had been reached. That happened after Iran shot down one of our helicopters, and our military responded with additional air strikes. In addition to other stories that have received coverage such as the rainy weather, there has been a lot of coverage concerning the trial of a teenager in Texas named Karmelo Anthony.

It all started last April at a track meet. Anthony was in a tent that belonged to another school, and refused to leave even after being asked and then told repeatedly to do so. Eventually, the situation escalated to him pulling a knife and killing another teenager named Austin Metcalf. The victim died from the stab wound which pierced his heart, and Anthony was arrested for murder after trying to flee from the scene of the attack.

He was placed on trial this past week, and found guilty of first-degree murder. The additional details of the case have led to another round of debate about race since Anthony is black and Austin was white. Outside of the courthouse a crowd of people assembled in support of Anthony, convinced that he acted in self-defense and deserved to be freed or at least convicted on a less severe charge of manslaughter. Of course, there are many on the opposite side of the debate who are convinced that the jury made the right decision in convicting Anthony of murder

and that he deserved to be put in prison for what he did. And then there are all kinds of individual opinions out there about whether or not the 35-year prison sentence that he received was harsh enough for the crime that he committed. Did he get what he deserved?

Getting what you deserve. People believe that life should always work that way. It's the conventional wisdom of the day. If a person kills someone, they deserve to get arrested, tried, and punished for what they did, and while that does happen in cases like we saw with Karmelo Anthony, it doesn't always work out that way. And as I've already mentioned, there are a number of people who believe he doesn't deserve to be punished at all. So conventional wisdom has problems. Conventional wisdom often reaches conclusions that are contrary to the realities of life because it's tainted and corrupted by what we know as the sinful nature. Conventional wisdom operates on the false assumption that people are basically good, and that shows us that conclusions reached by conventional wisdom will likely be contrary to God's Word.

In the Word of God, we find all kinds of truths that are contrary to the wisdom of the world, truths that are based on the realities of our sinful nature and God's perfection. We learn that even people who we consider to be good have to endure suffering, and we see that God has a different way of deciding who is good and who is evil. A person that has faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior is seen as good in God's eyes, and someone who has no faith is evil regardless of how good that person looks to the world around them.

In short, we are all sinners who wrongly believe that we are supposed to get what we believe we deserve. Our sinful nature doesn't just think that it deserves something from God, but it also thinks that we are better than Him and even more deserving than Him. I deserve to be heard. I deserve to have my way. I deserve to get what I want. Or to make the point even more directly, substitute the word "deserve" for "right." I have the *right* to be heard. I have the *right*

to get my own way. I have the *right* to get what I want. These are the things that your sinful nature cries out for, and it is constantly working to achieve them.

Your sinful nature wants nothing more than to ignore the selfishness of your demands, and it seeks instead to justify them with conventional wisdom. You deserve to be heard because you're older or you know what you're talking about or because your opinion is right! You deserve to have your way because you earned it and you've been here longer and you've put in your time. So the choices that you make are more important and should carry more weight! You deserve to have the things that you want because you give to others who don't have much, and it's okay to be greedy as long as you give a little bit to church and charity. Our sinfully tainted mind is very talented and very practiced at falsely convincing us of what we deserve!

But what is it that you and I *really* deserve? With the eyes of faith, we see the frightening answer to that question. We see that we are not worthy to have a relationship with our perfect and all-powerful Creator. His Holiness is too much for our sinfulness to bear. We don't deserve His presence in our life, and we certainly don't deserve any blessings from Him. What do we deserve? Condemnation. Death. Punishment. With the eyes of faith, we stand before God in this very building and say to Him together that, "We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment." That is what we are worthy of, and that is the *only* thing that we miserable sinners can stand before our Holy God and honestly say that we deserve. It doesn't matter what or who you are in this world, before the eyes of our Holy and Just God we are all the same kind of people, rebellious sinners who only deserve eternal punishment and damnation.

That's why the sacrifice of Christ was such an incredibly loving act. Paul makes this point vividly in today's text from Romans 5. He was inspired to write, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous

person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were *still sinners*, Christ died for us.” Even with the stench of sin leaking out of every pore of your body, even though your very nature is in open rebellion against God and wants nothing to do with Him, His love is so great that at the right time Christ died for you so that you could be saved from the hell that you really deserve. Now *that* is true love in action!

Through the loving and miraculous work of Christ in Baptism you are now a new creation before God, fully justified in His grace. It is the Living Water from the Son of God that brings you New Life in Christ. That’s why Paul can tell us truly, “...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” The faith that God gives to you as a free gift, is what justifies you, and then, ironically, God rewards you for possessing the gift that He freely gave to you in the first place! You did nothing to be justified in His sight. It is all His work, and then the Lord rewards you for benefiting from the free gift of His work! It truly shows how generous God is to us poor miserable sinners.

Even though we have been blessed with His amazing mercy and generosity, we are not immune from dealing with suffering, even though many false teachers would try to make you believe that would be the case. They try to portray the life of faith as being a cure-all for whatever problems might come your way. But, in addition to helping us see the extent of God’s generous mercy, Paul is also helping us see that there is a reason for us to suffer. Earlier in this chapter, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” To the conventional wisdom of the

world, suffering has no purpose and should be avoided at all costs, but to God, suffering has a purpose, to point you to the hope that you have in Jesus Christ!

The problem is that the people outside of these walls don't know that! They think that the world's wisdom is correct, and that they *deserve* to be saved because they are good people. They're convinced that having to endure suffering is a punishment. They think that Christianity is just about following a bunch of rules or living a good life, and they don't know that they don't deserve God's gift of everlasting life! They are in the dark while we comfortably sit in His Light. Jesus has called us out of darkness so we can be His tools to bring others into His Marvelous Light.

It is our job to proclaim the Word of God, both the Law and the Gospel, to the nations. That same Word of God that the disciples were sent out to spread. That same Word of God that Moses passed on to the Israelites in the Old Testament, and that same Word of God that Paul preached to the nations of the world. This is the Word of God that the lost are so desperately in need of, and it is the Word of God that we are all called to learn and then to share with all people around us, even those who are guilty of terrible crimes such as Karmelo Anthony.

Do people like that deserve God's mercy and love? Of course not, but then again, we don't deserve it either. If we had to work to deserve God's mercy, we'd all be in very serious trouble. No one ever deserves a free gift, especially not us sinners from a Holy God! No, the saving power of God comes to us only through Christ's death and resurrection, and because of God's incomprehensible love and mercy. Thanks be to God that He would give these precious gifts to us, and not give us what we really deserve. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.