

saved through his life!¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Take a look at the picture on the front of your bulletin.

This is how a bulletin is put together: the pastor who preaches writes the liturgy, chooses the hymns and puts the worship service in order. That order is given to the office staff who puts the bulletin together and chooses the picture on the front of the bulletin based on the scripture reading and the title of the sermon. Sometimes, that can be tricky.

This week was tricky. Linda Hester, who was designing the bulletin for today, came into my office last Monday and said, “There is too much in this scripture passage. The passage talks about faith and hope and grace and sin and reconciliation. Which one do I choose for a picture?”

I said to her, “I am having the same problem with my sermon. I usually like to choose just one topic and work with that, but this passage has way too many topics. How can I choose one topic? I don’t want to leave any of them out.”

I decided to keep all the topics in my sermon, and we decided to keep all the topics in the picture on the front of the bulletin. Linda used a Word Cloud Generator to create your picture. And it has almost every important word from today’s scripture passage.

So, if you are really bored with the sermon this morning, every time I mention one of the topics or words, see if you can find it in the picture.

→Since I couldn’t eliminate most of the topics in this passage, I am calling this sermon “The Basics.” Because this is what the passage is about...the basics of our faith.

I going to start with something hard: God’s wrath. Verse 9 “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”

People struggle with this concept of God’s wrath. So much so, that this word is not in the picture in your bulletin.

God's wrath is most clearly expressed in the Old Testament, which is why many people do not read it. Because of this wrath, some say the God of the Old Testament is not the same God as the New Testament. Others cannot believe that there is a God's wrath. How can a God of love be a God who exhibits wrath? But here it is, declared in the New Testament.

I often spoke about this with Pastor Larry DeLong, who was senior pastor when I first arrived here over thirteen years ago. We would talk about God's anger in the Old Testament and how do we reconcile it with God's love seen in the New Testament. Larry would say, "Everything changed with Jesus. Jesus changed how God responds to us."

Our scripture passage today tells what Jesus did to change everything.

If God was not a God of wrath, then Jesus would not have to come.....

The thing is we were and are designed to have a relationship with God. But sin entered into the picture and continually pulled humans away from God. We are not okay. However, we have a God who cares that we are not okay, and this is sometimes expressed as God's wrath.

I am going to admit this today: I want a God who expresses wrath. I want a God who hates evil. I want a God who gets angry when someone abuses another who is weaker than themselves. I want a God who hates rape and murder and war, and expresses anger towards them. I want a God who cares.

Christianity names and addresses the truth about the human condition. It acknowledges the reality that the evil we observe in the world is present in ourselves. And that sin pulls us away from the God who designed us to have a relationship with God and loves us.

Sin is a word we find in our scripture passage today. Here it is in verse 8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Here are words from this passage you can find in our diagram: demonstrates, love, died.

We all move through the world in the same state — broken and beloved.

If we were not sinners, Jesus would not have come....

We are *not* okay.

This is why Jesus went to the cross. You can hear it in the Old Testament:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6)

Hand illustration (from a course called *Alpha*):

Imagine my right hand is you and me (palm up). Imagine above my hand is God. Scripture say all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Imagine this piece of paper as our sin. I am going to lay it on my right hand. The paper, representing sin, is separating you and me from God.

Now imagine my left hand as Jesus. Jesus knew no sin, so nothing separates Jesus from God. But the scripture that I read from the OT describes the crucifixion and says the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. (I transfer the piece of paper from my right hand to my left hand.) In other words, while on the cross, our sin was transferred to Jesus.

For the first time in his life, Jesus is not separated from God, not because of his sin, but our sin. That is why Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” But look where that leaves us: (indicate right hand) free to have a relationship with God.

→Look what our passage says: verse 10 says “We were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.” Ah, another word in our diagram: Reconciled

One woman (Rachel Held Evans) said churches sometime feel like country clubs, when really we should be like AA meetings. When we come before God, when we have confession in our worship services, we say, “My name is Diane, and I’m a sinner.”

And God responds with, “Your name is Diane, and you are redeemed.”

Instead of looking at our faults, our brokenness, when we are at our worst, our Gracious God looks upon the work of Jesus in our lives.

The church is for sinners who are resurrected and redeemed and reconciled.

Therefore, we now have peace with God. Look at verse 1 (here come more theological terms): “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

More words from our diagram: justified, faith, peace.

We become right with God not by anything we can do, whether it is by doing good deeds (such as a great patio sale) or living an exemplary life. Rather we become right with God (or righteous) by putting our faith in Jesus Christ.

This movement from a state of sin to a state of grace through Jesus is called justification. Just as if we had not sinned. We're good with God. Have you ever went to apologize to someone, and they accept your apology and say, "We're good'?"

Because of Jesus, we have moved from a state of "not okay" to a state of "we're good."

Therefore, we are called saints. Our primary identity is based on who we are in Christ. We are saints who mess up, we sin, but we confess and we're good.

Now, that we are in a state of "we're good" with God and enjoying peace with God by faith in Jesus, how do we live in the real world of suffering, crisis, persecution, mass murders, distress and anxiety?

Our passage addresses this, too.

It is a universal truth that suffering exists. I started this sermon by talking about suffering and evil in the world. In the midst of suffering comes something positive. Let's read it in verse 3 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Again, you can find these words in our diagram.

Those who suffer have an opportunity to endure; those who endure will develop character; and those with character will be spilling over with hope.

Have you noticed that those who have suffered, endured, and been tested and tried generally are among the most hopeful people? Can you look back on your life and see the times of suffering, and how you changed, endured, became a better person with hope?

You have just been given a crash course on the basics of Christianity. I end with a phrase from verse 5: God has poured out his love into our hearts. In verse 8, this love was shown to us on the cross.

We started this sermon with God's wrath and ended with God's love being poured into our hearts. From the very beginning, God has never given up on us. Has never stopped loving us.

In the Old Testament, God became impatient with humans and expressed anger as in any love relationship, and yes, God expressed wrath towards evil, but God has never given up on us. So much so, that God came to be with us in Jesus Christ, so we could experience this love that has been poured into our hearts.

And because of Jesus' work on the cross, nothing can separate us from this love of God.

So why go through all of these basics of our faith this morning?

At a certain airport, a man was carrying a big, yellow sign with big, black block letters that said, "This is a Good Sign." As he walked along, heads turned, smiles broadened.

When asked why he was carrying such a sign, he said, "There is so much negative energy on the loose the loose these days, everybody is mad at something or somebody. So, about a year ago a buddy and I get together and said, 'We've got to do something about this.' So ever since then, wherever we go and whatever we're doing, we carry this sign. I know I can't change the world. But I also know that I can change the part of it I happen to be in at the moment."

As followers of Christ, we can change the part of the world in which we live. Our task is to tell this story and live this story. Since we have received reconciliation, we extend and practice reconciliation with others so broken relationships will be healed. Since God's love has been poured into our hearts, we extend that love to others. Since we have peace with God, we can help others find that peace. And as we exhibit hope in times of trials and suffering, we can give hope to the little part of the world we live in.

We're good.