

“HOW GOD USES A BROKEN LIFE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

July 31, 2016, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: Luke 22:31-34

Introduction: The Story of David F. Wells.

What a difference God makes through a broken and redeemed life. I was reminded of this again at Mindy Honcoop's wedding reception. It turns out Ryan Harper's aunt, his mother's sister, is married to the son of one of my professors back at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. I meet Dave and Lynne Wells and we had a great talk about how Dr. Wells came to faith.

This week I called her to clarify some details and she went one better and gave me her 75 year old father-in law's phone number. I spoke with him on Friday, reconnecting after 33 years.

Dr. Wells was born and raised in Southern Rhodesia which is now Zimbabwe. His parents were not Christians and lived in the bush where there were no churches. When we went off to the University of Cape Town to study architecture he fell in with some radical students and considered himself a liberal atheist leaning toward Marxism.

One evening he was dragged most unwillingly by a Christian student to a lecture being given by John Stott, the famous pastor of All Souls in London and well known author. At the end Stott issued an invitation to pay the cost of following Jesus, Wells walked out writing them all off as religious fanatics.

A week later his professor of architecture took a group of students camping and around the campfire one night, he shared his Christian faith which connected with what Stott had said a week earlier and later that night David Wells surrendered to the hound of heaven, to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. He dropped out of architecture and moved to London and sought out the man God used to change his life, John Stott, who immediately invited Wells to live in his home, which he did for five years. That mentoring relationship further shaped his pursuit of God's call on his life.

Dr. Wells, a God-denier and God-resister, became a great scholar and writer and professor and has influenced countless thousands of students preparing for the ministry.

In Dr. Wells' own words, "God gave me a willingness where there was none, where there was hardness and unwillingness; while doing my own thing, there was a silent invisible grace working."

A liberal, Marxist, God-hating, atheist, a broken sinner, becomes a God-believer.

Last week we finished up Peter's first letter. Before jumping into Peter's second letter I want to think with you about the sort of person Peter was and why God used him and how He used him. To do that first remember the kind of people God has used in history.

Saints who were all sinners.

Adam and Eve were sinners, they started it all and it hasn't stopped yet.

Abraham made some terrible decisions as a husband and a father. He made his wife lie.

Jacob was a deceiver.

Judah fell into sexual sin.

Moses was a murderer, a wanted felon.

Rahab was a harlot.

Samson was driven by lust and anger.

Saul was a paranoid king and driven by hatred of David.

David was an adulterer, a deceiver and murderer, and neglectful father.

Jonah was a deserter.

Mary Magdalene was a prostitute.

Peter was a denier, not just once or twice but three times.

Paul was a God-hater and persecutor of the church.

All the heroes of the Bible had baggage, and the pattern doesn't stop with the pages of Scripture.

Augustine was a notorious sinner, a drunkard and philanderer.

John Newton was a slave trader.

C.S. Lewis was an avowed atheist.

Rosaria Butterfield was an atheist, liberal, lesbian feminist, today a Reformed pastor's wife.

Every person God has ever used in His kingdom and in the church of Jesus Christ has been a sinner. Every one of them, no exceptions.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The very best intentions and actions of the very best Christians are all tainted, full of defects and imperfections, sin that deserves God's wrath but is used for His glory.

Let me be clear, God only uses broken, damaged, fallen sinners. All the perfect people are in heaven, there aren't any down here, not in this room or in this town or on this planet.

Why? Why does God chose them and work in this manner?

Let me give the short answer from I Corinthians 1 and then illustrate it with the life of Peter.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God...

31 ... as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

God intentionally does it this way for three reasons:

- 1) To destroy all human pride,
- 2) So that no one can boast, and
- 3) So that all have equal standing in God's family by His grace.

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to get us to admit how desperately we need God and that there is nothing good in us and any good that comes from us is from God. Our salvation and usefulness rests completely on Him. We must be able to admit this about ourselves and we must be able to admit it to each other.

Here is how Paul did that:

I Timothy 1:12-16 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

God took another ignorant, unbelieving opponent to be a display of His love and mercy.

Peter, a God-denier becomes a God-proclaimer. His sin and redemption.

Consider Peter. Satan wanted all the disciples, the you is plural, and he tried every way he could to get them. He had already entered Judas and now he wanted Peter in particular.

Jesus tells the disciples Satan is lurking about in their very midst though they can't see him, and that Satan is seeking their destruction though they are completely unaware of any danger.

While I am this very minute preaching the Word of God to you, sowing the seed of the Word of God, Satan through his demons is snatching up as much good seed as he can to make it fall among the rocks and weeds. We can't see it, but Jesus tells us that's what's going on.

There is an invisible enemy of our souls here yet we foolishly come to worship unaware, distracted, not praying for God to protect and guard us and our children, neglecting to take this spiritual battle seriously.

And we wonder why worship seems boring or uninteresting or not relevant or routine or whatever other seeds Satan is sowing in our hearts, hearts that aren't fighting and resisting him and seeking help from God.

Look what Satan did to Adam and Eve, to King David and Peter and Paul. Do we think we are better than them? Do we think we can stand when they fell? Do we think we don't need any armor or weapons, no need of faith and truth and Scripture and prayer?

With the arrest and crucifixion of Christ, with one blow Satan scattered the disciples and brought them all to the brink of disbelief and denial. Satan's roar at that moment was deafening and almost drowned out all the truth Christ had taught them.

The death of Christ was the ultimate temptation, that moment when all hope was cut off and lost. What was there left to have faith in? We can't begin to know the depth of that faith crushing experience. The Son of God, the Messiah, their savior and only hope was dead.

We are but sheep, easily frightened and scattered. But we have a shepherd who is able to gather the scattered and lost, who alone is able to rescue and redeem and reconcile.

Satan's purpose is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), but Jesus uses that purpose for His own purpose, to sift, to prune, to test and strengthen our faith.

Peter was proud and made a bold boast. He pay a very heavy price for his foolish arrogance. Jesus warned Peter and Peter foolishly answered by doubling down, making an even bolder claim. Peter sinned in not paying heed to the words of Jesus and in not paying heed to his own weaknesses and boast more about himself than he knew. Peter over promised and under delivered.

When Jesus restored Peter he asked him, "You once boasted that though everyone fall away you would not. Have you learned of your weakness, have you repented of your pride, of thinking yourself better than or above others?" Never forget your own weaknesses and never trust your own strength.

Jesus had a great purpose for Peter but it was a purpose that could only be fruitfully accomplished after a costly fall. Peter had to be broken, but out of that brokenness came a humble heart that loved Jesus and His church deeply.

O to grace is there any greater debtor than Peter? He betrayed Jesus with oaths and curses, he did what Judas did, yet by grace he was saved and delivered and restored and made great in the church of Jesus.

What saved Peter? The prayers of Jesus. Our enemies are so great and our hearts are so sinful and weak that apart from reliance on God, we are without hope. We have an advocate seated on the throne at the right hand of God who ever lives to watch over us and intercede for us. When the Son prays to the Father there is nothing Satan can do against that power.

If Christ let down His guard for one moment we would be crushed. Satan seeks in every way possible to undermine your faith with flaming arrows, but Jesus prays for our faith and upholds our faith in the fiercest storms.

What Jesus was doing for Peter on that fateful night, He is doing for us right now.

The final thing Jesus said to Peter is the message I want to draw out and leave you with. Jesus tells Peter after you have fallen and after you have been broken and humbled by your sin, after you have turned back again to Christ and repented and started again on the path of righteousness, ***then strengthen your brothers.***

Peter denied Jesus, he sank to the lowest depth, but he was not beyond redemption and being restored and used for God's glory. No matter how low you have sunk, even as low as denying Christ three times, even as low as murdering Christ's followers, Christ is there in the depths to forgive and lift up and restore to a place of usefulness in His kingdom and church.

This is the work of Jesus, to bring good out of evil, to bring strength out of weakness, to take our brokenness and use it for the benefit of others.

I doubt a day went by when Peter, like King David, would say, "My sin is ever before me."

Psalm 51:12-13 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

What a difference God makes through a broken life. One life transformed by the love and blood of Jesus. A sinner saved by grace, forgiven great and terrible sins, used by God for the benefit of the entire world.

Who do you want to rely on? Your sinful self or on the God who forgives sinners and raises the dead? Who do you want to boast in? The sinful mess you have made of your life or the one who loves to take weak, sinful, broken things and make them trophies of His grace and glory?

49 years ago, yesterday, July 30, 1967, Joni Erickson dove into the Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck and was paralyzed from the neck down. After fighting God she surrendered and found out what God can do through a broken, disabled, sinner. Today she leads a world-wide ministry.

Implications and application.

Are you broken? Have you ever fallen, have you ever been tempted to sin and sinned? Have you struggled in a long battle with some besetting sin?

When you sin and fall and you will, get up, repent, humble yourself before God and others, and then seek His reconciliation and forgiveness and restoration and usefulness.

Are you too bad for God to use? Are you of little or no purpose to God? Have you outlived your usefulness? Do you think your sins disqualify you?

Too many Christians have bought into the worldly lie of the kind of people who are useful to God. God purposefully uses the broken, the wounded, the uneducated, the unimportant.

You are just the one to help someone else in the same boat. You are just the one to tell what a bitter fruit sin is and what a painful path our own selfish desires lead us down. You are just the one to warn about the dangers of temptations and the dangers of neglecting God and His Word and prayer and worship with His people. You are just the one to point them to the grace of Jesus, to the grace of repentance and faith, to the compassion of Christ for those who have fallen. You are just the one to be gentle and humble and helpful and hopeful.

Those who have received the comfort of Christ are the best to share it.
Those who have received mercy are the best to speak about it.

We don't have to be famous or important by world standards. Behind all the famous well-known people are parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, school teachers, mentors, coaches. Many of you probably read about the coaches from our community who were inducted into the sport hall of fame and their testimony to the value of influencing young lives.

What have we learned from Peter?

I Peter 4:10-11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.