

March 12

Lesson 2: Ephesians 2:1-10

God's Overflowing Love

Context:

The scripture reading for this week comes from Paul's letter to Ephesians. This Pauline letter focuses on ecclesiology and who the church was in Jesus Christ. When reading Paul's letter, one can pick up on the fact that the church is strong and that there are many good leaders in place. Throughout the letter, another major theme is that Christ is the head of all the church. Paul wants the church to understand that it is because of Jesus that the people thrive and have a new identity.

In the first section of the letter, we hear Paul use a strong analogy about who the people were before they knew about Jesus. They were dead and did things that were in line with the customs of the day. They were arrogant and had destructive practices like other people of the day. But because of Jesus, the people were given grace. They were given someone who gave them new life and an example to follow and to be better.

But Paul goes on to explain to them that their salvation comes from their faith and that itself is a gift. It is something they cannot earn or possess. It is a gift given from God to humans so that they may be the people they are called to be. Because of this faith and new life in Christ, they are given a chance to be the people they are called to be.

Application:

When reading this passage at first, it may be hard to understand the language. Being a "dead person" does not sound like fun nor does the list that follows in Paul's words about how they were dead in their behavior and how they conducted themselves. But if you keep reading, you discover the power of the resurrection and the power of Jesus. It is because of him that we have new life and the ability to see the world differently. The gift of Jesus is one that continues to give life here and now.

We also hear the important part of God's gift: "This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did you can be proud of." Here we hear that salvation is not something we can own. It is not something we can put in our pocket and brag about how better or more spiritual we may be. Often, I hear people talk about when they were "saved." While I know that having a powerful conversion experience can be important, I find it more important to ask the question of how that "saved" moment opened them to new possibilities of being and how they came to serve God. It is great to have a wonderful worship or assurance of God's grace. But how did you understand it as a gift, something you did not deserve, but something that was given to you and led to a transformation where you realized God was bigger than you could imagine. And that God was empowering you to live out that transformation.

In the following verses we hear of the gift of Jesus where we become God's accomplishment created in Jesus to do good things and a change in our lives. We become part of Jesus' body, his hands and feet here on earth. When I was a counselor at Camp Sumatanga in North Alabama before I went to Vanderbilt, I learned that this was the message that so many of our campers needed to hear. I'll never forget the last two to three days of camp were hard because some of the campers knew they would have to leave and the camp high would be gone. They said life wouldn't be the same once they

left the beauty and safe space of Sumatanga. They would return to communities where life was the same. Kids would still be bullies. Cliques would still exist and people would be left out. People would still not ask big questions about poverty and helping others. Some of their churches would still not have programs for teenagers or children. Life would be the same.

My co-counselor and I discussed ways to help them realize they weren't alone and that God wasn't just at Sumatanga. God would be with them when they left Sumatanga and God's Spirit would still move in their lives. So for our closing activity we wrote these words of Teresa of Avila, a Christian mystic, on a large scroll of paper: "Christ has no body but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body." After that we had them all dip their hands in finger paint and then put their handprints over the words. We then had them cut up the words and gave them a piece of the poster to take home with them to remember that God was still at work on them and their peers wherever they may call home.

It was a reminder to them and myself that because of Jesus, we have new opportunities every day. All in all, our goal should be to honor God in all that we say or do and remember that Jesus was the greatest gift who continues to give life to us.