The Power of the Cross to Save

Second in the 2018 Lenten Series, “Come to the Cross.”

# Scripture: Colossians 1:9-23

# Key Thought: Paul’s metaphors explain how the message of the cross is basic to our salvation.

# Intro:

Today I would like to help us understand what Jesus has done for us by digging into the language metaphors that Paul uses in the passage that we read. It is important to remember that metaphors are analogies. They are word pictures. They do not correspond to the reality in an exact and rigid one-to-one way. But they do approximate it in useful ways that add to our understanding of it. As a matter of fact, in some sense, all language is metaphor. That being the case, the more language metaphors we are given to help us understand a given concept, the better off we are. So, today’s passage with its many descriptive words enriches our understanding of salvation wonderfully.

# Rescued and Redeemed

## Jerry Rescue statue in Syracuse

In Clinton Sq. in Syracuse, NY there is a statue commemorating a historical event called the Jerry rescue. About noon on October 1, 1851, federal marshals accompanied by local police arrested a man who called himself Jerry, also known as William Henry who was working as a barrel maker. He was arrested at his workplace on an initial mention of thievery, but it became evident that the real reason for Jerry’s arrest was suspicion that he was an escaped slave, although there is some debate as to his actual legal status. This was an attempt to enforce the hated Fugitive Slave Law. None other than Secretary of State Daniel Webster had declared in Syracuse the previous May that the Fugitive Slave Law would be enforced in all cities. However, Syracuse was the center of the Underground Railroad movement and a hotbed of abolitionist activity. It seemed that the timing of Jerry’s arrest had been calculated to inflame the sentiments of the Liberty Party, a staunch abolitionist group then meeting in a local church. To make a long story short, a large crowd gathered in the street to prevent the legal proceedings that would have attempted to return Jerry to his slavery in the South. They brought a battering ram and broke down the door despite pistol shots from a window. The marshal fled and the prisoner, named Jerry, was taken by the group, hidden in the city for several days, and later whisked off by wagon to Oswego from where he was able to cross Lake Ontario to Canada. Eventually, there were 19 indictments against the conspirators from the estimated crowd of 2500 rescuers but only one person was ever convicted.

How would you feel if you were William Henry—suddenly freed from the prospect of return to slavery?

## Rescues in Syrian city of Gouda

This past week, people were being rescued in the city of Gouda out from under rubble after the bombing of their city by Syrian forces. I cannot imagine the horror of living in a city that was being bombed. I cannot imagine the terror of having to help rescue people from the rubble – some already dead, and some hanging onto life. How would it feel to be one of the persons rescued from under the rubble? Life had come unexpectedly crashing in. There had been that terrible feeling of being completely trapped. The hope of rescue had seemed dim. But then, light -- rescuers had come.

## Jesus rescues our souls

In the passage that we read this morning, Paul describes what Jesus has done for us spiritually as a rescue! Jesus has rescued us from the “dominion of darkness” (Col. 1:13 NIV). According to the scholars, the Greek picture behind the verb “rescue” depicts rescuing a person who is caught in a dangerous current. Here in northern Connecticut in the spring time when even smaller creeks can become dangerously filled with rushing water, we can imagine the terror of being caught in a flooded stream. And we can imagine the relief of being rescued from that situation.

Spiritually, Saint Paul is picturing the rule of the enemy of our souls over us as a flood that carries us along. We need someone stronger who is not also being carried along by the flood who can stand and pull us out of the danger. That is what Jesus has done for us. As Paul wrote to the Colossians,

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” Col 1:13 NIV

## The basic meaning of redeem

A second verb coupled with the word “rescue” in Colossians is the verb to redeem. The image behind the word to redeem goes back into the Old Testament and the practices of the ancient world. During the time when it was common for people in deep debt to end up being enslaved, it was important that there be a way for friends and loved ones to be able to buy them back out of slavery. This action was called redeeming the person from slavery (Lev. 25:47-49). Property could also be redeemed. The word is first used in the Bible in describing God as redeeming the whole nation of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt.

 ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. Ex 6:6 NIV

The tenderest picture of redemption in the Old Testament is that of the kinsman-redeemer in the book of Ruth. The concept is a great foreshadowing of Jesus as our Redeemer. The kinsman-redeemer needed to be related by blood to the one being redeemed. He needed to be able to pay the price. He needed to be willing to redeem. And he must himself be free. (See Daily Walk p. 87) All these ideas point us to how Jesus was able to procure salvation for us.

The metaphor of redemption emphasizes that before we come to Jesus, we are under the control of our sinful nature. Paul describe our previous state as a kind of spiritual slavery from which God has redeemed us.

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Rom 6:17-18 NIV

Here in Colossians also, Paul couples our redemption with our being forgiven for our sins because of Jesus;

…in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:14 NIV

The metaphor of redemption emphasizes that we were previously being influenced by and inadvertently serving the enemy of our souls (Eph. 2:2). (To ask a question like, “Who paid a ransom to whom for our redemption?” as some medieval scholars did, is to press the metaphor past what it is intended to teach.)

## Taking the two metaphors together

So, when we look at the metaphors “rescue” and “redeem” together, there are two distinct takeaways for us today.

* The first take away is that both metaphors are meant to tell us that our situation without Christ is worse than we think it is. We are so prone to minimize the effect of our sinful choices. But when we picture ourselves without Christ as in shackles to our own lower selves we get the picture of how serious the situation is before we are redeemed by Jesus. And again, when we think of ourselves as being carried away in a swift current toward our own destruction, then we get the picture of how dangerous our situation is until we are rescued by our wonderful Savior!
* Second, when we think of both of those metaphors, we think of the joy of the person who has been rescued or redeemed. Someone has grasped them from chilling danger and delivered them to a safe situation. What joy they feel! That joy is ours when we think about how Jesus has rescued us from danger. That happiness is ours when we think how Jesus has paid the price for our freedom.

# Forgiven and Reconciled

Of the six words that I’ve chosen to dwell on today, the word forgiven is the most straight-forward. It requires the least description and explanation. Thank God that through Jesus we can be forgiven. Paul explained as he preached in Antioch of Pisidia;

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Acts 13:38-39 NIV

But forgiveness does require something of us. It requires that we accept the actual feeling of being forgiven and live in that feeling rather than living as if we had not been forgiven.

On New Year’s Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California Berkeley California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a young man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Picking up the loose ball, he lost his direction and ran sixty-five yards toward the wrong goal line. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, ran him down and tackled him just before he scored for the opposing team. Several plays later, the Bruins had to punt. Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, demoralizing the California team.

The strange play came in the first half. At half-time the California players filed off the field and into the dressing room. As others sat down on the benches and the floor, Riegels sat down in a corner, and put his face in his hands.

A football coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels.

When the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time, Coach Price looked at the team and said, “Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second.” The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He didn’t budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Riegels didn’t move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, “Roy, didn’t you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second.”

Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with tears. “Coach,” he said, “I can’t do it. I’ve ruined you. I’ve ruined the university’s reputation. I’ve ruined myself. I can’t face that crowd out there.”

Coach Price reached out, put his hand on Riegels’s shoulder, and said, “Roy, get up and go on back. The game is only half over.”

Riegels finally did get up. He went onto the field, and the fans saw him play hard and play well.

All of us have run a long way in the wrong direction. Because of God’s mercy, however, the game is only half over. (Wayne Rouse)

In Jesus, everyone who has confessed their sins and opened their heart to Jesus has the gift of forgiveness of sins. It doesn’t matter how lousy we have played in the first part of our life. All of us have made our share of mistakes and errors. We have rebelled against God’s laws for ourselves. But the verse applies to us all;

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Now it’s the second half of life, so to speak—the part after our forgiveness. The question for us is whether we will sit in the corner with our head in our hands, or whether we will go out with our head up because Jesus has redeemed us, has forgiven us, and we can live the rest of our lives for him! God has sent us back out to play the game again for him. By God’s mercy, the game is not over!

## We are reconciled

The word picture which is coupled with the word forgiveness is the word, “reconcile.”

Have you ever been estranged from someone that you really didn’t want to be estranged from? Maybe you had a disagreement with a close member of your family. Maybe you had an argument with a coworker with whom you usually got along very well. Perhaps a difficult situation arose between you and a child and you couldn’t wait until the relationship was back to normal. What does it take to be reconciled when we have quarreled? The question is hard enough to answer in our everyday human relationships.

Jane Schmidt writes, “One Saturday morning I awoke to the delightful smell of waffles and the sound of our two small boys in the kitchen with my husband. Padding down to breakfast, I sat on my husband’s lap and gave him a big hug for his thoughtfulness.

Later that day, my husband and I were having a heated discussion in our bedroom when our four-year-old, Jacob, stopped us in midsentence. Standing in the doorway, he said, “Mommy, try to remember how you felt when you were on Daddy’s lap.”

What a great picture of the feeling of reconciliation!

## Spiritual reconciliation

Paul’s message to us is that one of the great ways to understand our salvation through Jesus Christ is to understand that in Jesus we have been reconciled back to God. The cross of Jesus Christ is the means of that reconciliation.

“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Col 1:19-20 NIV

When we stop to think about it, we can see how we have become at odds with God. We have rebelled against his laws. We have intentionally gone our own ways. But God has taken the initiative in Christ, on the cross, to bridge the gap and bring us back to himself.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isa 53:6 NIV

## Taking the two metaphors together

So, when we look at the images –“Forgiven” and “reconciled” -- together, there are two more distinct takeaways for us today.

* First, we understand even more the nature of our condition before we meet Christ. It is a condition of a broken relationship between us and God. Paul labels the situation as “alienated” (Col. 1:21). We have done things needing forgiveness, and we have caused a breach in the relationship by our attitudes and actions. And we understand that this breach of relationship between us and God is very serious.
* Second, we understand that God has taken the initiative through Jesus and especially through the cross of Jesus to bring healing to the brokenness that previously existed in our relationship with God. Forgiveness and reconciliation are both words that speak of healing for a relationship. He is reaching out a hand across the gap. He has gone the second mile to repair the breach. The question is whether we will be humble enough to respond by accepting his offer of being at one with each other again.

# Brought into Jesus’ Kingdom and made heirs

Now here is where it gets even more exciting, from my point of view. The first set of analogies spoke about what God has brought us out of, what he has delivered us from. We were filled with joy because of our release!

The second set of words had taught us about how Jesus had helped us as persons in relating again to a personal God. The concepts of forgiven and reconciled were about interpersonal relationships between us and God. We rejoiced because we can love God again without the barriers erected by sin and rebellion, barriers which God has mercifully removed through the cross.

But Paul is not done expounding the Good News. Now he moves on to help us understand our new status and our future privileges. I’m reminded very much of an Old Testament verse. Moses was explaining to the Israelites what God had done for them.

But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors. Deut 6:23

I want to single out the verbs at the beginning; “He brought us out… To bring us in…” The Israelites had been through a lot in the desert. They would go through many more trials in order to actually receive the inheritance that God had promised them. But Moses was reminding them of God’s clear intention. God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt, to bring them in to their inheritance.

Now I think that should be something like a mantra for us. It would save us a lot of spiritual wandering. There are many times in our lives when we need to say, “God brought me out… to bring me in!”

Here in Colossians, God brought us out of the “dominion of darkness” in order to bring is in to the “kingdom of the Son he loves.”

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that God brought us out of being dead in our sins, and God brought us into new life in Christ (Eph 2:1, 4).

In Acts, where Paul gives his testimony before King Agrippa, he tells what Jesus told him about Jesus’ purposes for us. He says that Jesus told them that he was bringing us out of “darkness” and out from under the “power of Satan” in order that he could bring us in by giving us a “place among those who are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18).

Peter says that God has brought us in for “times of refreshing” (Acts 3:19) through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

## We are heirs

Paul says here in Colossians that another thing that God has brought us into is the status of heir. Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we now have an eternal inheritance. We are to be:

giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. Col 1:12 NIV

In Ephesians Paul wrote,

“In him [Jesus] we have obtained an inheritance” Eph 1:11 ESV

This verse is especially significant since Paul had just written in Eph. 1:5 that part of reason that God has “brought us in” was to for “adoption as his children” (NRSV).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1:3, 4 NRSV

So, you have a heavenly inheritance.

## Taking the two metaphors together

Again, let’s look at the two pictures,– being brought in and being an heir – together. Here are two more key takeaways for us today.

* God did not just send Jesus to patch up a problem. He has positive plans for us. As I teach from Eph. 2:10, “God has good works prepared in advance for us to do.” As Jeremiah put it, God has plans to prosper us, plans to give us hope (Jer. 29:11).
* Second, the good things God has in store do not end in this life. We have an eternal inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. God’s good plans for us are for eternity!

# Conclusion

As we close today, I have two questions for you.

1. First, have you opened your heart to Jesus and acknowledged what he has done for you on the cross? Have you allowed him to change your prospects? Jesus describes himself as knocking at your heart’s door waiting for you to open it. Have you done that? Are you doing it this morning? If you have never done that, I invite you to come to the cross – that is to open your heart to Jesus and what he has done for you -- to pray a prayer like this with me.

Jesus, I admit that I too am a sinner, alienated from you by my own choices; but I am thankful that Jesus died for me to bring me back. I know you are knocking on my heart today and I open the door of my life to you. Please forgive me for my sins. I invite you into my life as my Savior and as the Lord and leader of my life.

1. Second, some of you know that you have made a beginning with God, but you feel like you are in the wilderness. Spiritually you need encouragement. I would like to ask you to allow the Holy Spirit to encourage your spirit this morning. I ask you to come to the cross as well. Bring your discouragement and lack of hope to Jesus. Please repeat that phrase from the OT and let the Holy Spirit fill in the blanks in your mind and heart today.

I would ask you to fill in the blank with God’s help. God has brought me out of… in order to bring me into ….”