

Sermon May 5th, 2019

God's Forgiving Love Makes Us New

Have you ever committed to something then afterwards think to yourself “what was I thinking?” I remember agreeing to help my Dad move. I was in my early twenties so thought this shouldn't be too strenuous. My friends and I did help him move a few years ago. It was hard work, but at least he didn't get us to move his 50-inch old box television with a solid oak base down the four flights of stairs of his apartment building.

Well, this time I didn't have my friends helping out. The good news is we were moving from one ground level apartment to another. The bad news is we ran into some overwhelming circumstances. It started when my Dad wanted me to transport his multi thousand-dollar stereo equipment in my front seat. Here I had one hand on the stirring wheel and the other on the stereo equipment. My Dad came to a right turning lane with yield sign. I came up behind him. My Dad inched forward like he was heading onto the road. I looked down briefly at the equipment to secure it before taking my turn. Well, I didn't look up as I inched forward. SLAM. I looked up with trepidation. There was my Dad's car. The good news the stereo equipment survived the impact. The bad news I left a good mark on his bumper.

Then a trip later we were ready to transport his bird, and found that the bird had died. I was thinking this is the worst moving experience ever. I spent the next hour or so consoling my Dad.

Then when my Dad was ready to get back to moving he wanted us to move his bow flex machine. Mostly to save some money on the movers. If only we had a truck. Oh well it should easily fit in a midsize car trunk. Right. Well, it only took me an hour and a half to convince my Dad that no matter what angle we tried to fit this bow flex in it wasn't happening. I ended up wrenching my back. Dad in all his frustration over the car and the bird lashed out at me. I ended up yelling back and storming off.

Have you ever committed to something then afterwards think to yourself, “what was I thinking?”

When we commit to someone in a relationship whether it is a friendship or a marriage or a parent-child relationship we struggle to live up to the commitment we made. Your loved one is struggling with a health issue or a

break up and you are really struggling to be there day after day listening to the complaining. Listening to their pain. Or you end up saying something to hurt them during a heated conflict. Or you were hurt and are struggling to forgive. Or you realized after having children that this takes a lot more patience than you were willing to give. Or you didn't read the fine print in the oral or written contract you signed.

My favorite scene in the Santa Clause is when Bernard tells Scott that when he put on the suit he became Santa. When Scott disagrees, Bernard asks Scott if he read the card. When Scott looks puzzled Bernard shows him the card under this huge magnify glass. Then he sees the incredibly small print on the card. Sometimes we miss some of the small print on the commitments we make.

Have you ever committed to something or someone then afterwards think to yourself "What was I thinking?"

When we commit to work with others to create a healthier and vibrant society to live in we can come across differences of opinion. We can find ourselves struggling to understand their views or struggle to express our views in loving ways, especially when we are very passionate about what we believe in. We can end up in heated arguments that lead to division.

Have you ever committed to something or someone then afterwards think to yourself "What was I thinking?"

When we become part of a church community we commit to following Jesus. We commit to reflecting the love and grace Jesus exemplifies for us. We commit to gathering here on Sunday mornings. We commit to supporting our faith community with our gifts. We commit to growing in our faith through reading our bibles. We commit to loving our neighbor.

Faith is a commitment we try so hard to keep. And yet we find ourselves struggling to live out this commitment in our daily lives.

For Saul, he is zealous trying so hard to be committed. Yet, he ends up neglecting to follow one the most important commandments. He didn't do a great job loving his neighbor as himself. Instead, he is violently arresting Christians and having them beaten and killed. What Saul thought was the right thing to do ended up hurting a lot of people.

As the church we have struggled over what God is calling us to be. Sometimes we have followed certain ideas or ways that have ended up hurting people. It isn't easy to live out our faith when we wrestle with what it means to live out our faith. It isn't easy to love our neighbor when we struggle to understand who our neighbor is.

I wonder if Saul asked at times "what was I thinking?"

Simon Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, believes he can follow Jesus even unto death. Then when Jesus is arrested Peter denies Jesus three times to save his life.

As a believer have we ever denied who we are to avoid some consequence or challenge? We choose not to share that we are a Christian, because we fear that someone may say something mean to us, or goad us into a debate over whether there is a God. Or worse they flat out reject us.

Or we want to reach out to someone on the margins of society, but fear what people will think. Or question whether we are able to help. We get overwhelmed with the systemic problems that lead to this person living on the margins of society. We give up, because we feel the problem is too big.

We want to live out our faith everyday, but we struggle with some of the things we may have to sacrifice to get to church on Sunday. Or we struggle to connect to the stories of the Bible, and so, we are not so motivated to read it. Or we want to support the church, but struggle with all the other financial commitments and other volunteer opportunities we are committed to. Or we want to love our neighbor. But, struggle to understand each other. Struggle to work together.

I wonder if Simon Peter asked at times "what was I thinking?"

We sometimes hurt people. We sometimes deny our faith. We sometimes fall short of living out our commitments to God and our neighbor.

The good news is that Jesus meets us on the road to Damascus and forgives us. Jesus meets us by the lakeshore and forgives us. Jesus meets us at the car trunk with bow flex hanging out and forgives us. Jesus meets us in our marriages, our friendships, our parent-child relationships and forgives us. Jesus meets us in our dialogues, conversations, and forgives us. Jesus meets us in our faith communities as we worship and forgives us.

Jesus meets us at the font, and forgives us. Jesus meets us at the table, and forgives us. Jesus meets us as we hear the stories of God's encounters with us, and forgives us. Jesus meets us wherever we are and forgives us making us new.

For Saul, he is healed from his blindness and baptized. He becomes Paul and shares the good news to the Gentiles. He continues to face challenges as he lives out his faith. In moments of frustration he may still ask "what was I thinking?" But God does wonderful things through him giving him what he needs to prevail.

For Peter, he feels empowered by Jesus' forgiving love. On Pentecost Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on Peter. Peter goes on to share the good news throughout Judea. Peter heals like Jesus. Peter even reaches out to Gentiles with the good news of Jesus.

For Saul, he is made new through God's forgiving love. He is now someone who uses nonviolence to teach people how to follow Jesus.

For Peter, he goes from timid and afraid to confident and strong as he proclaims the good news.

For us, we too are made new through God's forgiving love. We find ourselves growing and changing all the time as we try to live out our faith in the world. As we try to be loving to our spouses, our friends, our children. As we try to be civil to those we dialogue with.

Yes, we have moments where we say to ourselves "what was I thinking?" when the commitments seem too much to bear. Yet, God comes to us in these moments and says, "Do you love me?" We respond "Of course we do." God then says "you are forgiven, tend and feed my sheep."

Let us pray, gracious God forgive us when we struggle to live out the commitment we made to you. Lift us up with your grace. Help us tend and feed your sheep like you tend and feed us. **Amen.**