

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

## Sermon October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### *God's Grace Moves Us to Reform the Church*

One of my fondest childhood memories was going to the circus. I remember how much I enjoyed watching the acrobats walk across a tight rope many feet above the ground. I admired how steady they were. All it would take is one little mistake for them to fall. And yet, they made it across every time I watched them.

As I reflect back on this memory, I do wonder how they felt dealing with all the pressure that comes with trying to do something without making a mistake? Especially with such a steep fall awaiting them if they had messed up. At the same time, I do wonder how many times they had fallen into the safety net at rehearsal prior to being able to do it in front of an audience?

Sometimes, in our everyday lives, we can feel like we are walking across a tight rope many feet above the ground (**Image: Use same image every time I say this sentence**). For example, having a parent who puts unrealistic expectations on you. Having a parent who always finds something to criticize you about. Having a parent who compares you to the sibling who seems to do everything right. Having a parent who puts so much pressure on you that you end up making more mistakes, because you are so nervous all the time. Worried that you are going to fail. Having a parent, where you feel that no matter what you do or how hard you work, it isn't good enough in their eyes. Sometimes we can feel like we are walking across a tight rope many feet above the ground (**Image**).

Or, you have a boss who likes to micromanage everything you do. You can't do a simple task without them having to look it over. You start to doubt yourself. You start to feel inadequate. You end up making more mistakes, feeling insecure in your job. Sometimes we can feel like we are walking across a tight rope many feet above the ground (**Image**).

Or, you have a spouse who puts you down all the time for not doing this or looking like that. Or, you have an adult child who expects more out of you than you are able to give. Or, you have a coach who benches you the moment you make a mistake. Or, you are part of a very rigid community who welcomes people only after they have met a long list of expectations. And if they fall short of one of these expectations then they are ostracized. Sometimes we can feel like we are walking across a tight rope many feet above the ground (**Image**).

What we often see when we are treated this way is that we start to treat ourselves this way. We start to put unrealistic expectations on ourselves. We start to get down on ourselves whenever we make a mistake. We start to put so much pressure on ourselves to succeed that we end up making more mistakes, because we are always feeling uptight and nervous. Sometimes we can feel like we are walking across a tight rope many feet above the ground (**Image**).

Today we remember the Reformation, a time where many people felt the pressures that come with having to live up to unrealistic expectations. The church at this time had poured a lot of focus on people's imperfections and need to lean on the church for absolution. To the point that a lot of people felt unworthy all the time. Martin Luther struggled with these feelings too.

What he came to learn through his struggle is that living with all this guilt. Living with this feeling that no matter what he did or say for the sake of the gospel, that it wasn't good enough. Didn't allow him to be all that God created him to be. Loving God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself.

On the contrary, he felt like he was more capable of messing up as he walked around afraid, nervous, that God would punish him if he didn't live up to everything the church had stated he needed to live up to, to be in right relationship with God. He felt like he was more capable of mistreating others, as well as, mistreating himself. Because he carried around so much anger and frustration for falling short all the time. For God's or shall I say the church's inflexibility.

Something needed to change.

Well, in his discernment, Martin Luther, came across a passage in Romans that changed everything for him. Luther read the passage we heard this morning, Romans 3, and came away from this revelation believing that he is in right relationship with God, because of what Jesus has done for him.

This belief lifted him from his heavy burden of feeling that he couldn't say or do anything that would be good enough. He was free to take a chance. To challenge the church to change into the type of community that reflects God's grace. He was no longer afraid, because he didn't believe that making a mistake made him a person unlovable. Unworthy. Unwelcome. Unforgiven.

Like the safety net below (**Image**), that gives the acrobat the support needed to take a risk and walk across the tight rope. Martin Luther now found his safety net. The graciousness of God through Christ Jesus.

And this empowered him to reform the church.

For Paul, he sees the pressures many people are feeling in the early church. The law is important to Paul, as it teaches us to love God and our neighbour. But the leaders sometimes put such high expectations on the people to live out these laws, that when they fell short, they were no longer welcome. Or they went away feeling unworthy.

Paul reassures us that Jesus Christ through the way he lived his life, through his death and resurrection, welcomes us with all of our wounds and shortcomings. God is a gracious God who isn't the parent or spouse or child or boss where we feel no matter what we say or do, nothing is good enough.

Instead, God is like the parent who sits with us and comforts us when we mess up. Forgiving us, and then helping us learn from our mistakes. Being that safety net that we need (**Image**).

God is like the spouse who supports us, who affirms us. Who is gracious when we are struggling to get things done around the house. Who doesn't shame us when we are struggling with our weight.

God is like the boss who assigns us a task and then trusts us to get the job done. But is available if we need support.

God is like the community where we feel welcome. Where there is flexibility to take risks along the way to help us grow in our love for God and for one another.

God is a gracious God who loves us unconditionally. God is a gracious God who forgives us when we fall short. God is a gracious God who frees us from this pressure, from this feeling of unworthiness, so we can be all that God created us to be. So, we can love one another as God loves us.

So, we can take risks in our context. Reforming the church where the church needs reforming. Not being afraid to make mistakes along the way. Knowing that God's grace is there ready to catch us when we fall.

This is the good news of Jesus, the truth that will set us free.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for loving us with all of our wounds and shortcomings. Thank you for forgiving us when we struggle to live up to your expectations for us. Thank you for freeing us from all that pressure that makes it hard for us to be all you created us to be. **Amen.**

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