

January 15, 2017

Second Sunday After Epiphany

“No MacGyvering Needed”

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Do you remember the TV show “MacGyver”? Lots of people loved that show. It was kind of silly, but folks dug it. No matter what the problem, MacGyver would use whatever was at hand to reach a solution. Nuclear bomb about to explode? Well, I’ve got a paperclip, a band aid and a large chunk of toenail—let’s disarm it!

I think part of the appeal was how comically ridiculous it was. But maybe part of it was the fantasy we all like to entertain; the idea that no matter how dire the situation, we are still in control of things; that through our own reason and brilliance, there is always a way out.

This was a major idea that Martin Luther railed against during the Reformation 500 years ago. Roman Catholicism taught that if you tried hard enough, did the good that was within you, you could maneuver your way out from under the condemnation of God’s good law. Unfortunately, such thinking still remains today, burdening souls who try and try but can never find enough righteousness in and of themselves to be certain of God’s favor. They attempt to MacGyver a God-pleasing life of their own making, but sin’s time bomb is always faintly ticking in the background.

Of course, we know better. Jesus Christ drained all the power out of that sin-bomb on the cross. Sin, death and Satan’s ability to destroy people all fell on the crucified Christ on Calvary, exploding upon humanity boiled down to one perfect person, true God and true man. In His perfect life and atoning death, Jesus did the good work that fully justifies us all. If we try to add to that, we’re really just denying it. Best to believe, receive and take comfort in it.

Another extremely popular move folks make these days is to depend not on their own reason and brilliance to MacGyver their life into one that is righteous, but to apply that reason and brilliance to MacGyvering Almighty God! The truth of sin comes close with its threat of punishment and not a problem—just band aid the lust and greed with “But God wants me to be happy,” tamp down the love and care for neighbor with a little “I earned mine, let them earn theirs.” Patch the guilt with a little “Well, at least I’ve never killed anybody.”

Basically we tweak God’s Commandments and God’s Word to make our damning sin somehow not damning sin. Big problem there: if the damning sin we desire is not really damning sin at all, Jesus Christ really didn’t need to die for it, now did He? No, if you’re comfortable in this practice you’re not comfortable in God’s grace, you’re comfortable in your damning sin. You’re really just MacGyvering your way out from under Christ’s cross.

I really hope I and all the pastors in your life have made it clear both those routes are wrong. We can’t add to Jesus’ complete and total atonement for our sin by His death and resurrection. He did all that need be done and can be done to accomplish forgiveness of sins. But we receive this gift by faith in Jesus unto repentance; sorrow over and turning from those sins—which are indeed awful sins—of thought, word and deed that still plague us.

But for many who know this simple truth of Christ, sitting in the pew in church or coming before God in private prayer at home is still an awkward and even a foreboding thing. We examine ourselves—our thoughts, passions, prejudices, politics and proclivities—and we find not just the sins of the flesh that daily plague us, but also a complete lack of the...what do you call it...the spiritual zest for following Jesus we know we should possess. Because of that we begin to think that we are somehow lacking; that we we’re failing at being a Christian.

So what do we do? We start MacGyvering our Christian life! We start looking for what we can do to fix things! How many of you have had thoughts like, “If I only read my Bible more...” or “If I only started praying more...” or “If I only could be more like pious Mrs. So-and-so three pews up and to the left,” or “If I only could only get more emotional in worship” (Good luck with that one in the Lutheran Service Book). “If only, if only, if only...If only I could MacGyver my faith into something more...then I would be...” What? Saved?

St. Paul writes to a bunch of messed up people struggling to live out their faith together: *“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Paul described this very dysfunctional church body as being one part of the worldwide church of God—the body of Christ and receiver of all—let me repeat—all of His gifts. He confirms the messed up people of this church possess the grace of God given in Christ Jesus. Paul says they have been “enriched in Him” and get this: you are not lacking any gift from God.

You have been baptized into and are presently worshiping in this very same church of God about which St. Paul was writing! Nothing needs to be MacGyvered here! Yes, you are a dysfunctional Christian. Yes, your faith is not all that it could be. True, your obedience is not what it should be. It’s pretty obvious to you, me and everybody else that none of us have the overwhelming passion, joy, and single-minded adoration of our Savior Jesus Christ that He deserves. But none of that puts us in a desperate situation from which we must devise some sort of escape! The escape stands accomplished by Christ’s cross and we are His beloved people in His church receiving His grace, mercy, forgiveness, life, salvation and every other gift He died and rose to lavish upon us! Despite you, He gives! You are lacking nothing!

Even as I preach this some of you might be tossing that special word up in your minds; “But...” But I get so angry. But I get so sleazy. But I get so stoned. But I get so self-righteous. But I get so worldly and unchristian.

Does any of that change who Jesus Christ is and what He has done? Does any of that change the nature of the free gift of grace He gives to all who believe on His name? Does any of that change what He has placed in this church of God for you? Does it nullify Holy Baptism, remove Christ’s very presence from the bread and the wine, render the power of God’s Word which spoke creation into being somehow powerless? Does you’re MacGyvering anything of your world stand in the way or somehow give aid to Almighty God in His work? No!

God’s gracious gifts are given in His church. Period. If you, even in your stumbling, fallen, weak-faithed existence, receive those gifts for the mercy of God in Christ that they are, they’re yours and they do everything God promises. You are saved.

Now in a proper reaction of joy and love for this mercy, if you want to pray more, study your Bible more, serve the church and your neighbor more, do any and all those things that might build and mature your faith and life in Christ more; well have at it! It will be edifying to you and give glory to God.

But don't think you are MacGyvering anything to gain the kingdom! It yours! You don't deserve it. You can't attain it. It's all gift of God's grace. If you begin making it about you, about your ability to be good unto God or your reasoning your way around His clear Word of Law and Gospel or even you're being too fallen and sinful to be saved, you're beginning to deny what He has accomplished for you in Christ Jesus. Jesus is God's gift of grace and He is given you in so many ways. And He does everything God promises He does.

Don't MacGyver your way to Him or around Him or away for Him. He is with you here, in God's church. Simply receive Him as your Lord that He is and walk with Him.

Amen.