

## *No Need for Do-Overs*

### Lord's Supper Service

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Randy pointed out that our lives are really summed up in those three words: the good, the bad, the ugly. That's us. The good isn't really all that good; the bad is worse than we can even imagine; and the ugly is always present, always threatening to undo.

I don't know if you've heard the golf term "mulligan." It's not Mike Milligan—there's no definition for Mike. But I looked up a definition—'cause he's an enigma wrapped in a puzzle, and whatever else—I looked up "mulligan", and technically speaking, a mulligan is "a stroke that is replayed from the spot of the previous stroke without penalty due to an errant shot made on the previous stroke." The result is that the hole is played and scored as if the first errant shot had never been made. Simply put: it's a do-over. Now, the PGA has never heard of mulligans in official scoring, but I can guarantee you that when the Flora family plays our competitive put-put version of golf, do-overs sometimes do have to come into play in order to maintain peace and to make sure that, you know, I can stay married and come back into the house. So sometimes we grant do-overs—not that Dana's ever needed a do-over, but I do, sometimes, when the ball leaves the—anyway, you get the point.

Do-overs are necessary to alleviate the consequence of bad play. Do-overs are sometimes needed when regret threatens to undo the person playing. Do-overs come with the possibility of a clean slate! You see why we employ do-overs? We employ do-overs because they make sense. Sometimes the idea of a do-over is attractive in this good, bad, and ugly life, because I don't want to feel the painful consequences of bad choices, do you? Regret, often lurking close by, threatens to undo my mind and my heart, tear down the guard of God's guardian grace, foster doubt in the loving, sovereign God and that he ordained my life to this point. Do-overs sometimes are very attractive because, when we think about who we are and what we've done, the idea of a clean slate is very attractive. The possibility of sinking sand on many fronts confronts us.

I'm here to state something very boldly as one who has employed do-overs in golf and other areas: that for the believer in Jesus Christ, for those resting in and trusting in Him, even with that humble reliance—faulty, frail reliance but reliance nonetheless—on Him... Believers, we have no need for do-overs in life, neither for our good nor for our bad, because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection from the grave. See, a do-over simply takes you back to point A again, and you put forth the effort to do what you didn't do right the first time, but in this life, we can't go back in time. In this life, you don't have Doc Brown and his DeLorean to start up at eighty-eight miles an hour—there's your movie reference. We can't go back and undo the things that we've done. We can look back—and we should. We should look back and learn. Even Paul tells the Corinthian church that. But for those who've placed their trust in Jesus Christ as the satisfactory substitute provided by a holy Creator for these sinful creatures, we don't need a do-over, because the work that is necessary has been completely done. That's what we celebrate as Christians. The shed blood of Christ provides us with a clean slate of forgiveness for all our sins—past, present, and future—and the righteous of Christ, the perfect obedience of God's holy law, that he provides to us as a free gift is our clothing and makes us acceptable before him. Is that the gospel that you've believed? That's the gospel that we've believed.

This morning in the Galatians class, we heard again Paul's really forceful opening to that letter to the church in Galatia: "If *anyone*, even an angel from heaven, comes and preaches to you another gospel, let him be accursed." There is no other hope outside of Christ's finished work on our behalf. That's our only hope for life. This morning we heard that dramatic story, both times that Randy read from Act

chapter 9 this morning, in the first service and then again in the second service. Even though I knew it was coming, I was moved—because you see the power of Almighty God. That’s what Pastor Randy was pointing us to. Do we believe that that’s how hearts are changed? I must confront my own heart first before I even thrust the question upon you, but that’s how God does it. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ. It’s the good news that Almighty God, Almighty God in the flesh, Almighty God with a body, and Almighty God with blood, would give himself for you and for me.

Have you ever thought about the sovereign ordination of God and the life of the man who would become the apostle Paul? Those moments leading up to that wonderful, fateful day on the road to Damascus where he was breathing out fiery threats against the church, when he was knocked from his journey and blinded? Have you thought about the fact that every day prior to that was a day that God had ordained for Paul? How can that be? We know from the Book of Acts that he was kicking in doors, taking away men and women, hauling them away to torture and even death. That God would ordain that to be, every day in the apostle Paul’s life, so that the apostle Paul would realize there is no do-over. Do you think he wanted some do-overs? Think he had regrets? Maybe. I wonder if he’s just like us. We live in real time, we have real memories, we can see the faces of those people that we’ve really hurt with words or with actions—or we look back on the accomplishments, and with a smug pride, we say, “Yep, I’m so glad I was there for them at that time. Ain’t I good?” And this is what the gospel informs: the good, the bad, and the ever-present ugly in us. This is what Jesus came to save: sinners.

We live our lives under the same sovereign and loving God as the apostle Paul, so I want to draw our attention briefly to a couple of passages of Scripture—and we’ll end up in Philippians 3—a couple of passages of Scripture to look at the apostle Paul, to look at these autobiographical references that Paul has given to us. The Holy Spirit, by his gracious preserving of this word, has brought it all the way here to October the 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, for you and for me, because we’re the ones here. We’re the ones that get to experience this word and then this sacrament, that God would meet us here and draw us close and remind us that there is no need for do-overs, not in Christ, because Christ has done all that was necessary.

So, I pointed out that letter to the Galatians we looked at this morning, but in Galatians 1:13 Paul is remembering the ugly. He says: “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.” Paul is reminding the Galatians—and maybe when he visited with people, maybe when they supped around the table, maybe when he fellowshiped from house to house, maybe some of the times he would expand on phrases as brief as those, and give to them some of the images that he remembers, not to glory in the gory details, but so that he could do exactly what he did in the first chapter of Galatians, and that is draw them to the mercy of Christ. “I was violently trying to destroy the church of God, and God personally displayed his mercy to me.” That’s how he sums up that thought in the first chapter of Galatians. He wanted everyone to know, “I don’t live in this regret. I don’t let that regret haunt me, although I’m sure it could.” All of those faces, all of those men and women, all of the news reports of those that had gone to prison, that died as a result of his zealous work to destroy the people of the Way. And yet Paul says it was this that highlights the lavishness of the mercy of God. God saves despicable sinners who are violently opposed to him. It’s just like Pastor Randy pointed out; can we imagine one of those darkly-clad ISIS members with a knife to the throat of someone claiming to be Christian from the west—can we imagine one of them becoming the strongest preacher in the middle east, or in Howard County? What a great challenge to think that way, because with man, that’s impossible! Forget about it. But with God? Paul’s life testifies to the fact that nothing is impossible with God. So Paul says, “I was violently trying to destroy the church.”

And then he acknowledges wrong as well when he is relaying things to young Pastor Timothy in the first chapter of Timothy, when he says, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord. You’re a brother Timothy, and

so I thank our Lord together. He has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy and appointed me to this service, even though”—here’s his bad and ugly—“even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.” He doesn’t glory in the gory, but he continues in the same exact breath and says, “I was shown mercy. I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. I didn’t even know what I was doing! Oh, I knew what I was doing—I had a plan, I had an agenda, I knew people’s names, I had the edict and the orders and all the other things—I knew what I was doing, but I didn’t *know* what I was doing. I didn’t know the God of grace. I didn’t know the God who had revealed himself in the person and work of Messiah.” But he says, “The grace of the Lord was poured out on me abundantly.” He’s just rejoicing! See, he could lament and he could regret and he could let those things conquer him and take him over, but he chooses to let those things be the vehicle to drive him to praise God again. It was this abundant grace that I’ve been given, along with the faith—that was a gift of faith, I didn’t come up with that, Paul says—and *love* that are in Christ Jesus. And then he says these words to Timothy; I love this verse, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” At this point, Paul had planted churches. At this point, Paul had preached. At this point, Paul had been recognized in the church pillars as an apostle. He says, “Look, I’m the chief of sinners, and I’ll highlight that as long as the day is on, because what that does is it highlights the abundant mercy and the lavish grace and the gift of faith and the gift of repentance and the matchless love of Jesus Christ my Savior.” That’s what Paul was doing with his regret.

So that’s the bad, and that’s the ugly, and that’s the stuff that Paul, I don’t know, maybe he *did*—maybe when he laid his head on the pillow at night, he regretted every one of those words he’d ever spoken. But in that regret, the Lord meets us, meets us with the gospel. There are no do-overs because it’s been done. All things that we’re ashamed of, all the things that we lament, all the things that we regret—what the pastor to the Hebrews says in chapter 12, that “For the joy set before our Lord”—he hated, he despised the shame that you feel more than you could ever hate or regret or lament the shame that you feel for what you’ve done; he *despised* it. He abhorred that shame, and because of that righteous anger and hatred of the shame that sin brings, he endured the cross on your behalf. That’s the glorious good news, right? So when we come up against things that our conscience seeks to overwhelm us with, those things that we regret, those bad, those ugly things, the gospel informs us that Christ already has that covered, and the forgiveness that we have is full and free.

What about the good? What about the good stuff? We can easily do that; look back, maybe not today for me, maybe not yesterday for me, maybe not this week—well, I can look back and find *something* good, somewhere in the past! There’s got to be something I’ve done. You know, it’s like when Maria soon to be Von Trapp and Captain Von Trapp are out there in the gazebo singing, “Somewhere in my youth or childhood / I must have done something good.” Because he’s got this beautiful thing there that he’s been given as a gift, so he had to earn it somewhere along the way! We have Rogers & Hammerstein theology; we think that because we live in the west, we must have done something good somewhere along the lines, because we’re not all that *bad*. That’s just the way of the enemy, isn’t it? Either choke the life out of you with the regret, or smug you up so that you don’t have what is real life with all the pride, with all of your accomplishments—right? It’s insidious. The gospel has an answer for that.

Here we see Paul again, autobiographical Paul—we heard elder Wayne read this this morning. I just think God’s trying to tell us something. I didn’t talk to Wayne, and I didn’t know what he had planned to read. So when Randy and I talked, I said “I’d like to probably bring some autobiographical stuff in from Paul, you know, since we’re looking at his conversion Sunday morning; this is Sunday night.” “Yeah, that’d be cool. Let’s do that.” Listen to Paul’s good stuff: “Though I myself have reasons for confidence”—that’s confidence in the flesh—“if someone thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I’ve got more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews in regards to the law of Pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for righteousness based on the

law, faultless." He just scrolls them off. That's his resume. All of his accomplishments, everything that's good, and he says, "If you want to compare resumes, I've got you beat!" Everything about the Judaisers in Philippi and Galatia and the one that were messing with him and the Corinthian church was all about doing it right. Getting it right. Being right. And Paul says, "I had it all right. I had everything right."

But salvation doesn't come by outward ritual; circumcision on the eighth day. That was how it was supposed to be done. He says it wasn't the seventh day and it wasn't the ninth day, it was according to the law and the ceremonial laws. "I was circumcised correctly."

It's not according to race. "I'm the nation of Israel. I'm pure Israel. I'm not half-breed Israel."

It's not according to ratings among peers. "I'm the tribe of Benjamin." Remember, Benjamin was the favorite son of Jacob after Joseph, and Benjamin was the pride of the twelve tribes.

It's not according to our ranking. "I'm the Hebrew of Hebrews. Pure Israelite." No mixture in Paul. It's not according to our religion; our salvation doesn't come by being set apart by the law. The word "Pharisee" actually means someone who is literally set apart or sanctified for the law's usage. That's why they were the ones to look to. That's what Pastor Randy was referring to this morning. If you wanted someone in the civil battle out there in the marketplace, you get alongside somebody like a Pharisee, because they're the one's that are gonna wave the Focus on the Family magazine probably wilder than we will, and uphold all the good things that are pleasing to God. He says, "I was a Pharisee."

And our salvation doesn't come through rigid discipline either. He says, "As for zeal, I was a persecutor of the church." You gotta understand that in Judaism, we have even in the apostles of Christ—Simon the zealot—zeal was a virtue; it was one of the highest virtues. They were rigidly disciplined in all that they did. There was no backsliding. There was just forward progress all the time, zealously so. And he says, "As far as zeal goes—man, I did it 110%."

And our salvation doesn't come by our righteous deeds. He was blameless, he says. And that doesn't mean that Paul thought that he never sinned; it means that when he sinned, it was taken care of the way that God in that old covenant way took care of sin. He said, "When the temple was open, I was there. When the priest called for confession, I confessed. All the things that the law required, I did it."

You see, these are really—it's a great resume. It's a great record. He says, "If we simply go on record, I've got it." And then he throws the monkey wrench and the whole toolbox and everything else into the fan or whatever, to cause a huge disaster—why? Because he says, "*But* whatever those gains were to me, I consider them loss for the sake of Christ. What's more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." I have to call a CPA up here, but there's two accounting words up here: loss and gain. It's economics. These are banking terms, they're for the marketplace, and what it basically means is, put a tally sheet together and lay it all out. He says, "As I lay out the tally sheet of everything that I could possibly accomplish, it comes up equal to dung. Refuse. Garbage. A pile of it." He says, "It's nothing. I'm not gonna ever place my hope in that." It's what we heard this morning; looking for life when there's no life to be found. Paul says, "It's not there; it won't be found." Where is it found? "I'll consider—I'll account those things as all a loss. I'm not gonna place my hope in them, that I might gain Christ and might be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but a righteousness which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." What righteousness is that? It's the righteousness that Christ has completely fulfilled God's holy law and amazing grace, how sweet the sound, he says, "I'll give you my record."

When you stand before a holy God, here's the record that you need: "I've lived it for you, it's yours. The only requirement is that you believe that I am who I say I am. And you confess who you really are. If you agree with me that you have no good within you—there's not one of you righteous—if you agree with me that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory; if you agree with me," Jesus says, "that there is only one exclusive way to the Father in heaven and that's through me," Jesus says; "if you agree with me, if you believe that, it's yours." That's the pure, unadulterated gospel.

With drops of grief and all these tears we could cry, the only response we have is, "Lord, I give my life away to you. I'm yours. Everything." That's what Paul is saying: "I want to be found in him. I want to know Christ, and yes, I want to know the power of his resurrection and participate in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Paul recognizes that—we've gone through this before, in the Scriptures—this life is like *that*, compared to eternity. He says, "Listen, this is the life that we have right now." It's a life of good and bad and ugly, and it's a life of pain, and it's a life of sorrow, and it's a life of confusion, and it's a life where we've got many people in the hospital or going to the hospital. We've got people like Wayne prayed for this morning struggling with that mindset of anxiety and depression and turmoil within. That's us. That's the human condition. Don't think that you're the anomaly, but rather, hear Christ say to you, "The good, the bad, the ugly—bring it to me. That's why I came. I came for you. And I came in the flesh in order that you who live in the flesh might know that I've conquered this life in the way that you live it. I didn't come as this floating apparition. I didn't hang thirty feet above everything and not touch the weaknesses of you. I came for you."

Randy brought this phrase to my attention a couple of years ago; we shouldn't be singing any "Susie" songs. You know what that is? If you can replace Susie with Jesus, then you're probably messing with a song that you probably shouldn't be singing. I like that criteria. I think that's good criteria. But that same coin, you can flip; every so often out there in the world, secular artists are writing songs where they're trying to just totally let their hearts be known for the one that they love, right? I was running the other day—if you can call it running—I was jogging, I was walking really fast, and my feet were both off the ground at the same time, and in my iPod thingy, I had Phillip Phillips. Maybe you're not familiar with him; he won the American Idol contest several years back. And Phillip Phillips' new album was playing, and this song called "Unpack Your Heart" came on. What I'd like to do, if I may be so bold, is to read this from the perspective of the lover of my soul. Not Phillip Phillips, but the one who laid down his life on my behalf. I think this is invitation—if I can be, again, so bold as to put that in these terms. He says:

Meet me where the sunlight ends  
Meet me where the truth never bends  
Bring all that you're scared to defend

And lay it down when you walk through my door  
Throw all of it out on the floor  
Your sorrow, your beauty, your war  
I want it all; I want it all

Bring your secrets, bring your scars  
Bring your glory, all you are  
Bring your daylight, bring your dark  
Share your silence  
And unpack your heart

Show me something the rest never see

Give me all that you hope to receive  
Your deepest regret dies with me

The days when you stumble and fall  
The days when you grind to a crawl  
The treasure that hides behind your walls  
I want it all; I want it all

Bring your secrets, bring your scars  
Bring your glory, all you are  
Bring your daylight, bring your dark  
Share your silence  
And unpack your heart Unpack

I'm on your side  
So shed your shadow  
And watch it rise

I'm on your side  
So shed your shadow  
And watch it rise  
Into your darkness  
I'll shine a light

Bring your secrets, bring your scars  
Bring your glory, all you are  
Bring your daylight, bring your dark  
Share your silence

Bring your honor, bring your shame  
All your madness, I will tame  
Won't you lay down your guard  
Share your silence  
And unpack your heart

I believe that's what Jesus wants us to do. I think he's calling us to be aware of our frailty in such a depth that we can't ever begin to hope that we've got some modicum of strength to live the life that he calls us to live, so that in humble reliance on his grace, he feeds us, he equips us, he carries us through. Lord, I have no righteous record, so I rely on yours. Lord, these regrets that I have of the sins that I've committed threaten to undo me. Forgiveness covered, full and free. I think that tonight that's what I want this meal for us to be. I want to pray for us, and then we'll distribute these elements as the Lord is pleased to do so in our presence through his servants. Let's pray together.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we come before you trusting that your Holy Spirit is at work in a particular way. Lord, we trust you to take the words of us humans and penetrate into our hearts your truth and the comfort that comes from Christ's sacrifice—truth that is too beautiful, Lord, for us to try to even verbalize in small settings like this. And yet, Lord, these glimpses we do catch of a God who would not leave us to our own devices, but rather, quite the opposite, come as one of us and pay the price that our sins deserve. We want to celebrate you tonight. Lord, I pray that those of us who receive these elements now by faith, that you would strengthen our faith, that we would not rely on anything in us, that

we would be more aware tonight of our weakness so that we might boast and glory and revel and rejoice in your strength. And Lord, we recognize that we are still, when we leave this place, frail, and so would you be pleased now to equip us even one more step forward in this journey of life that you have us on. Help us, Lord, to have lives that proclaim you and your death until you come. In the name of Jesus we ask. Amen.