

**"Responding to Salvation"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) **Luke 7:11-17**  
2) **Luke 15:11-32**  
3) **John 11:17-44**

**Stewardship as Response:** We have been talking about stewardship as response; response to our true identity as God's children and as our response to God's grace and love. Stewardship is our response to God reaching out to us. Stewardship is response.

**Salvation:** God continually reaches out to us. We see this vividly through the whole story of Scripture, which is our story. God reaches out to us with grace, with love, and today we want to discuss how God reaches out to us through the gift of salvation.

For you what does salvation mean? My regular dictionary defines salvation as "The act of saving or state of being saved; preservation from destruction, ruin, loss, or calamity." In Greek the word is "sotaria" which means deliverance, preservation, release. In Hebrew the word for salvation is "yesa" and means to "bring into a spacious environment."

In that sense then, salvation is being able to see more clearly; it is taking off our blinders, letting go of our preconceived ideas, unbinding our traditions; it is opening ourselves to a new vision; it is creating a huge space to experience life in a brand new way; it is opening ourselves to transformation, to resurrection, to being born again, to the process of becoming new creations.

Scripture is clear that salvation is an act of God. In the Old Testament salvation is the primary work of God. Save is used as a noun 146 times and as a verb 354 times always in reference to what God is doing. God saves.

The New Testament records Jesus only using the word salvation once, in Luke 19:9 when Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "Salvation has come to this house today." As we talked about two weeks ago Jesus' extension of grace to Zacchaeus, gave Zacchaeus, the space to begin again, to open himself to the process of transformation.

In Mere Christianity, in reference to salvation, C.S. Lewis writes, "Christ's work of making "New People" is like turning a horse into a winged creature. . . It is not mere improvement but Transformation." Salvation is creating the space to become new. We have heard two beautiful stories of salvation already today listen to one more. **Read John 11:17-44.**

**Impetus for Salvation:** Three stories of salvation: Lazarus raised from the dead, the Prodigal Son welcomed home, and the widow's son raised from the dead. What is the impetus for salvation to occur in each of these stories?

**Lazarus – Persistence, Misunderstanding and Anger:** In Lazarus' story salvation comes through persistence, misunderstanding and anger.

Mary and Martha came to Jesus overcome with grief, as any of us would if our brother had died. Their grief, however, led them to be stuck on "if only". If only Jesus had come earlier Lazarus would not have died. If only Jesus would have taken action. If only God would respond as they wanted. If only!

They also were thinking selfishly and shortsightedly. Would life really be better for Lazarus if he came back? Lazarus may have been quite old. Was somehow bringing Lazarus back going to be in his best interest or only a selfish desire of Mary and Martha?

Mary and Martha's persistence and selfish desires led to Jesus' building anger. From that

place of anger Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead with the hope that in response to that action people would come to believe. What we see here is anger that leads to positive action. We so often think of anger as a negative emotion, but anger can also be a positive motivator. Jesus' anger led him to take an action that would help people know the saving power of God. When in your life has anger motivated you to positive action? When has anger led to the creation of space which led to a new beginning?

**Brokenness & Love:** In the story of the Prodigal Son, the Son gets to a place where he is able to recognize, own and take responsibility for his sin and brokenness. When he hit rock bottom he was awakened to his selfish and destructive life choices. The magnitude of the Son's moment of self-awareness was then matched by the Father's joyous outpouring of grace. In this synergy of awareness and grace salvation was birthed. That astounding moment created a new beginning for the son and the father. When in your life have you experienced the synergy of awareness and grace that led to salvation, to new life? When has awareness and love created the needed space for a new beginning?

**A Broken Heart:** When Jesus entered the town of Nain and saw the widow grieving the death of her son his heart broke. Jesus' broken heart led to a powerful moment of salvation. When have you experienced a broken heart creating space for a new beginning?

**Salvation Moments:** These three stories begin to illustrate the breadth of avenues that lead to moments of salvation, to moments of new life, to moments where the space is created for a new level of self-awareness, for new levels of faith, for new levels of maturity. Salvation moments abound. The question is, "Are we ready to receive the gift?"

We don't know the answer to that question in relation to any of these three stories. We don't know whether Lazarus' resurrection brought salvation to anyone. We don't know whether the Son's coming home and the Father's love led to salvation for anyone. We don't know that Jesus' raising of the dead son led to salvation for anyone. All we know is that the space was created for salvation to be received. But we don't know if anyone seized the moment. To use C.S. Lewis' image we don't know if anyone from these stories became a winged creature. We don't know whether anyone was actually transformed.

What have been the transforming moments of your life? Those moments are salvation moments. Those moments are gifts from God. How have we responded to those moments?

**Bringing the Church Together:** Let me give you an example of a salvation moment in my life.

I grew up in the church, both Methodist and Presbyterian. I worked in the church. I volunteered in the church, but I never had the opportunity to experience different churches from different theological perspectives interacting with each other; at least, not until I was ordained.

As you know my first call was to North Platte, Nebraska. I had been in town only a couple of days when my pastoral colleague invited me to join him at the local ministerial alliance meeting. That sounded great to me. When I walked in I was excited to see pastors from probably 20 different churches. I thought to myself how cool is this; all these churches working together. But within about 2 minutes I realized these pastors didn't like each other. And within 3 minutes I experienced them not treating each other well. I had never been in a room filled with so much tension. I left demoralized. I left broken hearted at the state of Christ's Body.

That was a salvation moment. It was a moment filled with potential and possibility. In that moment a huge space was created within me to envision the church differently. The question was how would I respond? Would I ignore the moment? Would I give up on the church? How would I respond?

From that moment a passion began to grow in me to bring Christ's Body together, a passion

that still informs and directs the choices of my life. In that moment a significant transformation began to take place within my life, within my theological understandings, within my ecclesiastical understandings. That transformation continues to this day. That moment was a huge salvation moment in my life. It was a moment of new beginning. I have tried to live my life in response to that gift of salvation.

**Conclusion:** Salvation happens when space is created within us for new beginnings. What have been your salvation moments? What have been our salvation moments as a congregation? Have we chosen to live our lives as a response to those powerful moments? Our awesome God is a God of salvation. Will we choose to receive the gifts of salvation as they come to us? If we do how will those salvation moments shape the living of our lives? Let us be a people who overcomes our fears and embraces the salvation of our God. Amen.