

Soul Refresher: Just As I Am
Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost
October 27, 2019
Psalm 51:1-12
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Psalm 51 (NRSV)

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;^[a]
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right^[b] spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing^[c] spirit.

Lately I've been seeing a lot of Facebook pictures that have captions with the gist of "Be kind." Have you seen them?

A longer caption that catches my heart is about being kind BECAUSE (and should we *need* a reason to be kind?) is because we don't know what a person is going through.

Their struggle might not show on the outside.

We don't know what they are dealing with emotionally, financially, physically, spiritually.

So, I'm going to tell you about something that happened to me this last week as a way to explain where I'm going.

Not all of you know that on Tuesday, I had the unfortunate opportunity to face plant onto the sidewalk. Face. Plant. Chin first.

As I laid there, a woman (who saw the unfortunate event) interrupted HER day to pull onto Pikes Peak Avenue, get out of her car and help me, someone she didn't know, back into the church and she stayed with me until I had Gene on the phone.

Turns out that my chipped tooth was the only outward sign (initially) of what was really going on in me. The abrasions didn't get their full "color" until a while later. No one would have known. Not yet, that I had a concussion.

I'm not sharing this because I want sympathy (ice pack maybe, but not sympathy) but to make us MORE aware of others among us whose pain isn't necessarily on the outside and that everyone could use some kindness.

RIGHT IN OUR OWN FAMILY OF FAITH, sitting right next to us, are people who are struggling.

I mentioned physically, emotionally, financially – all of those earlier.

Some of us are struggling with addiction – in many forms!

And depression or health scares.

ALL OF US struggle because we are sinners.

I'm not going to go too far out on the limb (at least without a helmet) when I point that out!

Some of us are looking for answers.

Some of us are feeling weak or tired.

Gee, is it any wonder, we could use some kindness?

What about feeling doubtful or unworthy?

And the weight of our sin?

Yeah, we admit, we can repent, but we'll probably fail again.

So, I want you to hear this: **BUT GOD!**

Don't have answers?

Okay – But God is working on our behalf.

Feel weak?

Sorry – But God's strength makes us strong.

Experiencing *hard* things?

God, my dear friends, is standing beside us.

God is going before us – no matter what we're in or what we feel like.

Not one of us is WITHOUT God and when we stand on God's Word, no matter what we're praying about: our families, our health, our joy...OUR SINS...we are NOT alone.

We've been preached to that we don't **have** to be "better" before we put our hope in God. We simply have to come.

But, we're torn, right?

About trusting that God is who God says God is?

In 1835, Charlotte Elliott was thinking that same question.

She'd been sick, which caused her to be disabled, and she was depressed.

Others were able to serve God. She didn't feel like she could.

So, to fight those feelings, Charlotte wrote a list of the reasons she trusted God, and that list was the start of today's Soul Refresher hymn, "Just As I Am".

This hymn is a BUT GOD hymn!

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me*

*And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come! I come.*

Psalm 51 is one of the first psalms I ever connected in worship liturgy. Growing up, I recall repeating, in the confession before Holy Communion, several of the verses that David read for us. Later in study I was able to tie the psalm to the writings of Isaiah (1:18) *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;”*

When Charlotte Elliott wrote her list she recognized flaws: illness, conflicts, doubts, and fears.

And, praise God, she also grew in the trust that God loved and accepted her just as she was.

Billy Graham explained it this way.

We “have ‘no plea’ – no claim on God’s love or forgiveness – except that Jesus shed his innocent blood to reconcile us to God.”

We can’t earn salvation – the freedom from sin. What we do need to do is *simply* (and I know it’s NOT simple) receive it through the grace and mercy of Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

But we don’t make it simple do we?

We live in a world that gives kudos of acceptance for a good career, lots of friends and success. And where do those kudos get us?

Right in the middle of the struggles we listed earlier!

Isn’t it ironic that we find it hard to receive the acceptance we are struggling for – the acceptance from our Savior?

We try to fix our own problems.

It’s like trying to wipe a stain off a favorite shirt.

We want to appear better than we actually are, and we forget that God created us in God’s OWN IMAGE.

And we forget that God doesn't desire the good *intentions* of human standards, but the very hearts God made.

We're (like the song says) "poor, wretched, blind."
God is all we need – giving us "sight, riches, healing of the mind."
I pray those words stand out to you when we sing later.

See, God responds to us with open arms and proves God's love by sending Jesus to cleanse us from the filth of sin and problems and pains we're carrying around (and that others can't see that we're struggling with.)

Many of you know, "Just As I Am" became a very popular as the classic end at Billy Graham Crusades. That came about because, 99 years after it was written, a teenaged farm boy heard the hymn at a revival. He came forward to give himself to God. It was Billy Graham! And throughout his life, he used the hymn as a reminder of the choice we ALL HAVE, to follow the One who IS, WAS, AND WILL BE – the One Who is the "But God."

And talk about naysayers.

In the 1960's the media reported that thousands were responding to Billy Graham's message about the Gospel Good News of Jesus Christ just because "Just As I Am" was playing on people's emotions.

Well, Mr. Graham wanted to prove that it wasn't just the lyrics to "come" or the comforting melody....it was the Holy Spirit at work.
So, after much prayer and conversation with the music team, the Crusade leaders decided to SKIP (!) the hymn while they were in London.

For 30 nights not one note was sung or played.
And people still came to the invitation to surrender to God.

The reporters had to write that "all we heard was a shuffling of feet on the floor."
And then they admitted, "Bring back 'Just As I Am'! The silence is killing us!"

It was NOT the invitation in the hymn, but the promises of God.

God's love doesn't change to the beat of a song.

God's love is unconditional and steady; something sure that can be trusted, that flows through us. All we have to do is come.

We want to impress people...

...to say "just the right thing" that will make others want to know Jesus like we do...

...or do "the one thing" that will take away the conflict of politics AND of the church...

But, those things sound like we're trying to impress God!

That may **sound** good, even holy, but they're actually ways of denying WHO God is.

And who we are.

God doesn't *need* us.

We need God!

God is all-sufficient but gracefully allows us to participate in the Kingdom work of redemption of Creation – the world and humanity.

Hmm, does that include "being kind?"

Or being the "hand up" of healing?

You can't see the headaches of my concussion, BUT GOD does...and holy healing has begun.

What "headaches" do we have that could use that kind of healing?

See, we don't bring anything to the table in this relationship with God.

We come, "Just as I Am."

And we rely on the blood of Christ, the love of God, and the movement of the Holy Spirit in us.

Just come.

Listen! Even with outward success – job, family, whatever...our inward struggles and failings still need the blood of Jesus to stand before God.

The Apostle Paul understood it this way (and wrote it to the Philippians) (3:7-9)

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. ...I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ....”

We can't stand on our own goodness or accomplishments.

And, **even more importantly**, we can't hold back because we are sinners.

We can't make ourselves worthy.

We have to come to the One who makes us worthy.

Be kind – we can never be sure what someone is hiding!

Are we hiding anything?

From each other?

From God?

Why?

Do we think we can “fix” things and come to God better than yesterday?

It doesn't work that way.

First of all, since our righteousness comes from God, hiding can drive us deeper into sin!

And second, WE CAN'T HIDE FROM GOD!

God IS God.

God knows where we are – talk about a great GPS!

God knows where we are - 2927 W. Pikes Peak Ave.

God knows where we are – mourning, stressed, fighting...fill in your “blank” of struggle.

God knows where we are....ready to come...to repent...to fall on God's mercy...to trust and believe that Jesus' loving sacrifice takes away our sin.

Are you afraid to accept that Holy Kindness?

Fear not!

*Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

God knows our weaknesses.

God knows better than we do...and even knowing, doesn't demand that we make **ourselves** perfect, but only that we admit (to ourselves AND to God) where we're falling short.

And that we give that – ALL OF what THAT to God!

God won't turn away – God loves us too much.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Just come.

Just as you are.

Amen!