

Peter, Paul & Mary: An Easter Sermon by Karen Lucas

God is for us!

Romans 8:28-29, John 20:1-10, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, John 20:11-18

Bible Passage

PRIMARY TEXT

Romans 8:28-39 (NIV - New International Version)

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is For Us!

OPENING ILLUSTRATION:

In 1962...a secular jew, a spiritual seeker, and a lapsed southern Baptist put out their self-titled record: Peter, Paul, and Mary. Their first track was a song titled "Early in the Morning." Paul Stookey, the spiritual seeker of the group, wrote it. The two opening lines resemble several of the resurrection passages we often read on Easter Sunday morning.

“Well early in the morning...About the break of day”

The rest of the song, however, goes on to describe the singer's desire that God would help them find their way in life..

TRANSITION:

Despite the questions and doubts about faith, the lyrics seem to articulate awareness of Christian beliefs and hope in a loving, gracious God who will..."as they say,

- Guide them to the golden stair,"
- "Bear their burdens" and
- call their name on judgment day.

MY SERMON IS NOT ABOUT THE BAND PETER, PAUL, AND MARY.

It's about the Peter, Paul, and Mary from the Bible

- their experiences with the resurrected Jesus
- and how they learned that...

GOD IS FOR US! (main point)

RESTATEMENT:

Today, I want to remind you that God is for you because God is for all of us.

CONTEMPORARY REALITY: First, let's get honest & address some questions:

1 (Me) ---- Is God Really For Me?

HOW DO I STRUGGLE WITH THIS? If God is for you, who can be against you?

INSERT PERSONAL TESTIMONY: I learned to love the passage we just read during my last year of studies at Emmanuel College.

- Started off great.
- Got off track.
 - Like most young people, I was trying to find my way - and differentiate myself from my parents.
 - In the process, I got involved with some people who did not exactly strengthen my faith.

- Next thing I knew, I found myself blurring the line between trying new things and dabbling in sin
 - By the start of my senior year, I was so far off track
- If sin is missing the mark, I was so off base that I didn't even know where the target was.
 - Some days I didn't even know if God was real.
- If God was real, how could God possibly still be for me after my disrespect?
- Also, if God was really for me, why did I keep messing up?

2 (You) - Is God Really For You? HOW WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH THIS:

How can God still be for us when we aren't doing a good job of loving him?

- Don't know enough about God.
- Haven't done enough things for God.
- Want to do right but keep doing wrong.
- Maybe we feel like we don't deserve for God to be for us.

Or maybe it's the opposite.

Maybe you are trying to do as many things right as possible, but things keep going wrong.

- You are sincerely doing the best you can with what you know
- But, You feel like you can't catch a break.
- You wonder if God is mad at you or something.
- If God is for you, where's the proof?

3 (God) – WE SHOULD ASK WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT.

What can scripture reveal about our questions about whether or not God is really for us?

- 1 Let's take a look at Resurrection Day for Peter, Paul, and Mary to see if we can find some answers.

Sermon in a nutshell:

Peter, Paul, and Mary show us that God is not just for us,

God is Our

1. Long-Suffering Lord (Peter)
2. Gracious God (Paul)
3. Tender Teacher (Mary)
4. Dependable Deliverer (Me,We,Us)

1 - Peter and His Long-Suffering Lord

Bible Passage

John 20:1-10

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"**

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon **Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.** The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.**

Explanation

In a way, it still seems like nothing has changed for Peter.

- He's still wide-open and thick-headed.
- He's still Jesus's bodyguard...even in death....
- Jesus wanted Peter to learn to follow him, not guard him.
- Never mind that Jesus had told him to put away his sword just a few nights ago when he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant.
- Never mind that just a few weeks before, "Get behind me, Satan
- Never mind that Peter had failed him, denied him, despite claiming he would die with him if he had to

Never mind all of that. On Easter morning, Peter was still Peter.

- And when Jesus' body went missing
- Mary went running straight to who..... "Simon Peter" to tell them...."They have taken the Lord out of the tomb"

- And who shot up strapped on his Nike's and sprinted to the tomb to handle the "problem"? Simon Peter...with John close behind.
- Simon Peter....

And let's not misunderstand the passage. Simon Peter didn't show up to Jesus' tomb to shout "He's Alive!"

- No. He and John just returned to where they were staying to try to make sense of it all.

HOW COULD GOD STILL BE FOR SIMON PETER AFTER ALL THAT?

- **because God is for us! He knew Peter's heart.**
- Despite all Simon Peter's blunders, stubbornness, and failures, Jesus appeared to Peter along with the rest.
- Jesus appeared to him again at the beach - 3 opportunities for redemption.
- Then Jesus commissioned him to be the new shepherd/leader of his followers.

For Peter, Jesus was long-suffering (patient).

- When others looked at Peter and saw a shipwrecked life, Jesus saw a diamond in the rough,
- He patiently chiseled away at Peter, as he learned to follow before he tried to lead.

2 - Paul and His Gracious God

EXPLANATION:

Paul was different in this story.

- He was not actually a disciple of Jesus.
- Nor was he there on the first Easter morning.
- Paul met the resurrected Jesus in a rather dramatic way.

He is introduced at the end of Acts Chapter 7 as a young man still known as "Saul."

- Saul witnessed Stephen's execution (first martyr)
- He undoubtedly heard Stephen carefully explain how Jesus had fulfilled every scripture and was indeed the Messiah.

But Acts 7:54-60 tells us that they started yelling, covered their ears, and rushed and shoved him out of the city so they could stone him to death-- and they threw their clothes down at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Perhaps Saul had some influence due to studying under the famous Rabbi, Gamaliel.

Chapter 8 of Acts tells us Saul was consenting to Stephen's

. --- Afterward "a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria"

As for Saul, the scriptures say he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison!

AFTER ALL THAT, HOW COULD GOD BE FOR SAUL? ----- GOD IS FOR US EVEN WHEN WE GET SERVING HIM ALL WRONG

- **Paul experienced the risen Jesus as a gracious God....**
- **who quite literally knocked him off his high horse to get his attention.**
- **See Saul thought he was being a good Jew.**

CHAPTER 9 reads:

9 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

SOMETIMES GOD HAS TO BLIND YOU WITH THE LIGHT OF HIS TRUTH TO ADJUST YOUR VISION:

- He needed a new vision of what it meant to be faithful to God in a Messianic, post-resurrection era.
- Later in 1 Corinthians....READ
- Paul came to experience the Risen Jesus as a Gracious God.... whose grace he could not stop talking about, whose message he was willing to suffer in body for, whose truth he was
- Paul needed a personal encounter to confront his well-meaning dogmatism.
- So, that's what JESUS gave him...and when God did that for Paul.... the result was a gift for all of us.
- We owe him for 2/3 of the New Testament.

Bible Passage Support – SEE 1 Corinthians 15 - Focus on: 1-2, 9-11

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am

what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

3 - Mary and Her Tender Teacher

Explanation: Mary and Her Tender Teacher

Last we look at the story of Mary and her Tender Teacher.

We return to the rest of John's story of Easter morning.

After Peter and John went back to wherever the rest of the disciples were staying...a heartbroken, bewildered Mary stayed behind.

- Now, if you know the story of Mary Magdalene, you know...
- After that she was a devout follower.

Of course, she is the first to go to the tomb as soon as Sabbath was over.

- She wants to give Jesus a proper burial since he gave her a proper life.
- Who would ever understand her like Jesus,
- fight for her like Jesus,
- heal her, welcome her, or give her hope like Jesus...

How could God still be for her if God, as she knew him was.... dead?

Bible Passage

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

**18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"
And she told them that he had said these things to her.**

Mary and the resurrected Jesus

- In that moment.... Mary learned from her tender teacher that there was still so much more to learn....
 - And she was entrusted with the message.
- IT was time for the student to start becoming the teacher.
 - She had no idea that her testimony would resonate with thousands of generations.
- "I have seen the Lord!"
 - He is risen!

4 - YOU (Me/We/Us): Our Dependable Deliverer

IF GOD IS FOR YOU, WHO CAN BE AGAINST YOU?

ME (FINISH THE TESTIMONY:

I was disciplined by the school, but they didn't pull from the traveling Singing Group.
(might have been because of logistics or fundraising)

- For me, that was a saving grace, a lifeline.
- Because music has always been a tool God uses to open my heart and mind to who he is.
- While traveling we began the first set with, "I Was Made to Praise You."
- Second set: My friend Chris preached a mini-sermon that began with this scripture passage..."If God be for you..."
- I wrapped up the entire set with a song called "He'll Welcome Me."
- The message of the songs and Chris' sermon got into my soul and transformed my life. Each night we sang. God restored more in me.
- **Once I learned to depend on Jesus to fix my life, I learned that he was a dependable deliver.**
 - He delivered me from sin, death, hell and the grave
 - and he will do the same for you.

RECAP: DRIVE HOME

PETER

If you're thick-headed, stubborn, violent, and overly confident like **Peter**.
Thinking you'll die for Jesus, only to find you deny him when the pressure is on....

- **God is for you! He will be your long-suffering Lord.**

PAUL

If you're ashamed to look back on your past.
Because you know you've been over-zealous, sanctimonious,
persecuting people rather than trying to reach them with the love of God
run God's name into the ground with your nasty attitude
and you need your vision adjusted like Paul

- **God is for you! He'll be your gracious God.** One day you'll be able to say like Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am. His grace has not been ineffective for me.....I am changed!"

MARY

If your past is scandalous. If you think no one will give you a chance.
If you think no one would understand where you've been or who you are becoming
If you've known the tender mercies of God and you've tried to follow Jesus but your trail
has suddenly gone cold and suddenly you feel abandoned...

- **God is for you.** Don't stop following him now. There's so much more to learn and He'll be your tender teacher.

YOU

If you think all hope is gone....because you've gone too far, you've messed up too much,
you've lived a double life, acting like a saint in public and like a sinner in private. You've
disrespected and dishonored God, you've let sin rule where faith and obedience should
have reigned

- **God is for you.** Let him be your dependable deliverer like he has been for me.

Who is he to you this morning? Who do you need him to be?

Your mighty counselor, your prince of peace, your everlasting father, your provider, your
deliverer, your righteous ruler, your healer, your friend,

HEAR him say,

"Why do you think I would ever give up on you?"

- I am for you!
 - He lived and died for all of us - JOHN 3:16
 - So we could find new life in him.

- Have you put your faith in him?
 - Have you made him your Living Lord?
 - Your Gracious God,
 - Your Tender Teacher
 - Your Dependable Deliverer?

God is for you!

- **The question now is are you for God?**