

Preached by Dr. Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
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Romans 1 – Selected Verses
Matthew 7:21-29

PUTTING THINGS RIGHT

I don't know where you were yesterday when the rains fell—two and a half inches near my house. While I was trying to complete some weeding which was long-past due, I could tell that the rain was coming. It was easy to see it, but I had a little help. Sully, my dog, was in the garden with me and well before it started to rain, he left his post where he'd been so obedient to sit and wait. He looked at me as if to say, "We need to go someplace safe, it is about to be dangerous." Maybe it was the thunder that preceded the rain or just the change in the atmosphere, but he was clearly nervous.

Where do you go when you need to feel safe? Where is your refuge, that place where you know everything will be okay? Maybe it's a special place in your home. Maybe it's your car. Since we spend so much time in them, I wonder if our cars don't provide us some strange sense of security. Some of you may have even thought that you come here when you want to feel safe. Yet, is this one of the ports that we visit when there is a storm in our life? Very often, the church becomes something that we hide our problems from. Faith becomes something that we embrace privately, but the church is about living in a community. It was a community that was being rescued in Psalm 46.

Mark Twain liked to describe the church this way: the church is a group of really nice and respectable people and they get together weekly, and one of them who is a nice and respectable person gets up and tells everybody to be nicer and more respectable. When that happens, faith becomes less than meaningful for us. This is not, Paul says, a place to come and encourage one another just to be nice or nicer.

This morning I heard a sermon from McLean Bible Church, and I was amazed at the honesty with which the speaker spoke. Lon said that one of his greatest spiritual gifts is the spiritual gift of self-destruction. What? I would correct Mark Twain if I could and say that maybe the church is at its strongest when we recognize how quickly we claim that gift, that spiritual gift of self-destruction. I wonder if we can recognize that there is something very different that is meant to happen here in our midst. I wonder if we can hear Jesus say that it's not just saying religious words that confirms our relationship; it's not just doing good things or being responsible that confirms that we are one; it is the way in which that relationship infects everything else.

I know that you don't often feel that you're on special assignment for Christ, but we all are. We have that special assignment to let everything that we do be based on the foundation of the Gospel of Christ alive. Our greatest redemption might be if we could say with Paul that I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. I'm not ashamed to admit that without Christ, my life would be in ruins, and I hunger and I thirst for that sense that I am indeed put right with God and with those around me. I hunger and I thirst for that sense of con-

viction and sacrifice with a genuine apology—a word of repentance, to share with our Lord.

The truth is, Jesus didn't say that we should come together and feel safe. Jesus said, "Pick up your cross and follow me. The road to the kingdom is narrow; the gate is my word for you, my life that you live." When things are put right in our lives, we see again that our redemption, our salvation, our hope of hearing Jesus say, "Well done," is more about his faithfulness and less about our own.

So, we can go out from here and never see the church or one another in the same light. We can go out from here and see that things are indeed right in our lives because of Christ. That's what this meal teaches us. So take in Christ's obedience. Take in the bread and the wine and the juice. Take in Christ's willingness to know our wants, to know us thoroughly, and still forgive us. And more, want to be in a relationship with us. We will sing later about what a treasure that is. Let us now respond to God with everything that we hold dear. Let us make a sacrificial offering of our wills and our affections of our lives.

So let us worship the Lord.