

## *The Redeemer*

Sunday 9 August 2009 – Rev Lance Thomas  
Romans 3:21-26

Out at Lakes Ranch my son Leon has built a big fire pit that people can sit around, cook sausages, toast marshmallows, sing songs, that sort of thing. Around the area he has planted a whole lot of little native trees. In time this is going to be a real special place, open to the sky, outdoors but sheltered by native bush – lovely. But he has a problem, he loves the little native trees he has planted but so do the local rabbit population. He has got some poison, he has a rifle. If the vision he has for this area is ever going to be realised he has no option but to protect his creation. His mother might say, oh the poor bunnies, but the reality is the bunnies have got to go if the trees are to survive.

Imagine Leon's dilemma if they weren't wild bunnies but the kids pet bunnies. Or even worse, it wasn't the bunnies at all, but his own children, despite knowing they shouldn't, deliberately set about destroying his creation, his vision. There would have to be some consequences. Hopefully not 303 consequences.

We began our preaching series on knowing more of the living God with the statement that if the world was created by a person, it was created for a purpose. That purpose we concluded was a unique personal eternal relationship between God and his creation, particularly between God and the most valued part of his creation, humankind, us.

As we have followed the self revelation of the living God through the Old Testament we have seen the problem God has with sin. Sin destroys God's creation. It harms unto death the very creation God cherishes. Sin murders the possibility of a unique personal eternal relationship. Sin begins in the garden where Adam and Eve do not trust God, they know better. We have followed God's struggle with sin. At the time of Noah he nearly pulled the plug on a creation in chaos. We have seen the calling of God's chosen from Abraham and the fruiting of that seed in Moses and the people of Israel and the commandments of the desert. The law and the sacrificial system that came with it. We have seen God's preference for the poor and his outrageous love for Israel, demonstrated in Hosea's love for his adulterous wife Gomer. All of this dramatic historical saga is set in the context of God's great dilemma – sin the enemy of God's purpose. If left unchecked it will destroy the very creation of God, the focus of God's enormous love. But the most beloved of that creation, humankind is the agent of the very sickness that is destroying the creation. What is God to do? His love is such that he cannot but protect his own. God instinctively and in anger deliberately reaches for the 303, the can of poison, to eliminate the threat. But God's love is such that he cannot destroy the pinnacle of his creation, remember the promise of the rainbow.

There are people who are immediately turned off a message because it uses the word 'sin'. I have been told the church will never reach people as long as it keeps talking about sin.

Practical Christianity that's what the world needs. I couldn't agree more about the practical Christianity bit, but when most people use that sort of language they are usually referring to a selection of the second half of the ten commandments. We looked at that earlier. A sort of recipe for good community. But it doesn't work. The ten commandments are not a recipe for good community, they are the boundaries of the community of believers. Love the one living God, worship only the one living God, trust in the one living God – and then the rest becomes possible.

If we don't understand the holiness of God, the purity of God's intention for creation then we will not understand sin, the rejection of the living God, opposition to the purpose of creation. If we don't understand holiness, if we don't understand sin, we will never fully understand the Cross, and if we don't understand the Cross, we will only ever see Christianity as an occasionally effective model for good community living.

This is where the Apostle Paul enters our picture this morning. He is writing to the Church in Rome, he is writing to the Jewish believers who have become followers of Jesus. He is talking about the problem of sin. The separation of humankind from God's purpose. And he is addressing the view that many Jewish believers have, that the problem of sin is for those

who are not Jews. After all the Jews are God's chosen people, they have the law, the commandments, the sacrificial system. They can't be the problem. Paul argues that all the law does is show us we *are* the problem. It shows us what God's holiness truly looks like and despite how hard we try, we can't achieve it. But, says Paul, there is another way. It's the way the prophets told us would happen.

This being put right with God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, there is no difference. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All – no exception.

I had the flu a couple of weeks ago, a man's flu, the nearest a woman could come to understanding a man's flu might be childbirth! I don't think it was swine flu – I called it canine flu – I was sick as a dog. The stoic that I am of course, I still came to church and I preached. I should at least have had a surgical mask on, preferably a little bell that I shook, crying out as I came through the church, unclean, unclean. But my male pride really struggles with the idea that I could be part of the unclean. But I am. And so are you. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are part of the problem. We are in the team that is in opposition to the purpose of God. All of us. We are destroying creation. There has to be consequences. God can't just let it happen. But God also loves us like we can't imagine. Hence the Cross. Remember last week we looked at the Word – the Cross is not just Jesus' work – it's God. It's not like Jesus, the good cop who comes to protect us, save us from the wrath of God, the bad cop. It's all God, all Jesus.

Paul uses three images to try and make clear what God is doing on the Cross. Two are a bit strange to us, one a little bit more familiar.

The first is a sacrifice. In the sacrificial system as people grasped the extent to which their sin destroyed God's intentions, God gave them the sacrificial lamb on to which they laid their hands, transmitting their sins, and the lamb experienced the death, became a substitute for that which should have been theirs, as they opposed God.

On the Cross, Jesus, became the sacrificial lamb for the sin of the whole world. One, once, for all.

There was an African preacher who told the story of walking across the countryside on the way to church and somebody was following him. He looked back to see it was Jesus. And Jesus was carrying this big sack on his back. The preacher said 'are you carrying the sin of the whole world in that sack, Lord?' 'No', said Jesus, 'just yours.' The sin of the whole world, even yours.

The second image Paul uses is 'redeemed'. It partly came out of the slave economy of the day. Something up to 20% of the population in the Roman world were slaves. A slave could be redeemed for a price, what it would cost to replace him, free him or her from slavery. The image also comes from a warfare practise. The victors would capture prisoners who they would kill unless a ransom was paid for their freedom. It is interesting that this week Bill Clinton has gone to North Korea to arrange the release of those two American journalists. Everyone is sure that America must have paid a price for that freedom.

Paul says the price of your freedom from the slavery of sin, your ransom, your redemption, is paid on the Cross.

The third image is from the law courts. Following conviction, guilty as charged, the debt is paid. By another, justified – just as if I'd not sinned. The sinner stands before the judge of heaven, guilty – but the punishment has already been exacted. The Cross.

In our law courts the judge would say you are free to go But that is not what the judge of heaven says. The judge of heaven says you are free to come. The Cross is not just about our redemption. The Cross is about the redemption of God's creation, God's purpose. The one who opposed God's purpose, destroys God's creation, is now invited into God's purpose again. A new creation. The Cross is not just an account for the cost of sin. It's the doorway, the invitation into the new creation.

And there begins a new process in the redeeming of creation. It's called the sanctification of the redeemed of God. But that's a story for another day!