

Welcome

Right after we got married - like the same week - my wife and I moved from Missouri to Ohio. One of the first friends we made there was a couple who had us over for dinner. It turned out, the husband was of Swedish descent and really took pride in his heritage. Their home had Swedish flags hanging in it, and he even prayed for the meal in Swedish.

So it wasn't a huge surprise when, a couple of months later, his wife asked me what I had planned for Swedish Day.

I should explain: one of the interesting cultural features of Dayton, OH, where we had moved, was the abundance of festivals. From April to October, there were multiple festivals every weekend. Strawberry Festival. Popcorn Festival. Italian Festival. German Fest. Irish Fest. Hispanic Fest. Garlic Fest. Chocolate Fest!

I'm not exaggerating. So I wasn't *super* surprised when my friend asked me how I was planning to celebrate Swedish Day. I confessed, however, that I didn't know Swedish Day was coming up and asked what she and her husband had planned.

"Nothing much," she said. "We're just going to go to Ikea and get some Swedish meatballs."

I mean....that's a pretty great way to celebrate Swedish Day, right?

I didn't give Swedish Day another thought until *another* person asked me, "Hey, what do you have planned for Amanda for Swedish Day?"

This person was not Swedish, as far as I knew. So I stammered and again confessed I didn't have anything planned. That person looked confused, and a little bit sad and walked away.

But when the *third* person asked what our Swedish Day plans were, I got nervous. A third time, I confessed - this time with a good deal more embarrassment - that I had no Swedish Day plans. Person three whistled like I was going to be in trouble and said, "Wow. Good luck, man."

"What gives?!" I finally exclaimed. "Why is being Swedish such a big deal in Dayton? Did Swedish people settle here or something?"

They looked confused, then started laughing. "Not Swedish day. *Sweetest* Day!"

"What's Sweetest Day?" I asked.

"Sweetest Day! You do something nice for your sweetest! It's like Valentine's Day, but in October!"

It's true - Sweetest Day is a regional holiday popular in Ohio and Michigan. And my Swedish friends who were going to Ikea... it turned out they just really liked Ikea.

That's a silly story, but it illustrates an important truth we're going to be exploring this morning: There's a big difference between living in a place, and truly being part of a place.

It took us a lot of years to feel like real Daytonians, and the same has been true since we've moved to Texas. It took us a couple of years to embrace 'y'all' and get season tickets to the state fair and calibrate the proper amount of pity for Oklahoma.

Any of you who are transplants know that feeling, right?

We're going to be exploring what it means to be saved today, and I want us to think in these terms - that being saved is like moving to a new place: God's kingdom. God's country.

We're going to explore what learning to live in God's country looks like, and how God is present with us to help us learn how to live as God's children.

Message

This is the season of Epiphany, when we celebrate that the God who came to us at Christmas is not only for us, but for the whole world. This year, our Epiphany series is called "Church Words with Friends". We're going to be exploring some of those words Christians use that can be confusing. Maybe they're words like "Gospel" that are unique to Christianity. Or words like "grace" or "blessed" that pretty much everyone uses, but no one is exactly sure what they're supposed to mean. Our goal is to understand our faith better so that we can be better conversation partners with our friends and neighbors outside the Church.

And since friends are so nice, we're going to do two words each week. By learning these 'church words' together, we'll uncover new dimensions to our faith.

We began with God & Trinity, and discovered that when we say God is Trinity, we're saying God is most essentially self-giving love. God created us to join in giving ourselves in love to each other. Next, we talked about Gospel and Incarnation and saw that what makes Jesus worthy of our worship, what proves he is a god worth following, is that he demonstrates his love by becoming one of us, giving up his divine privileges and sacrificing himself for us. After that came Wrath and Atonement, and we saw that the cross isn't about God taking a Xanax or punishing Jesus instead of us. Rather, it's about God loving us enough to save us from ourselves.

Last week, our words were Grace and Blessed, and we saw that the life God saves us *for* is a life where we are present to God and to each other. So today, we're going finally going to talk about getting saved. What does it mean?

Salvation is a pretty straightforward word - the Greek word *sozo* means basically the same thing as our word 'save' - to rescue. In the context of everything we've explored so far, it makes sense: God intervenes in our lives to rescue us from the death and destruction we bring on ourselves.

And, as we saw with 'grace' last week, salvation is free. The author of Ephesians affirms this early in his letter when he insists:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. -- Ephesians 2:8-10

So: Salvation is when God rescues us from sin and death. It's a free gift we can do nothing to earn it. Except, elsewhere, Paul drops a verse like this one:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. -- Philippians 2:12 (NRSV)

Work out our salvation? I thought it was a gift by grace we can't take credit for. Which is it?

To help us understand what's happening here, we need to introduce our other word for the day: Sanctification. It's one of those \$20 theological words that's actually super important in our tradition. We put a lot of emphasis on Sanctification (you just don't hear us use that word because, well, it's a \$20 theological word).

So what is sanctification? One easy way to understand it is that it's the present tense of salvation. We talk about God's rescue of us in three parts: salvation past, present, and future.

The first is conversion, where we come into a life of faith. If you're familiar with altar calls or prayers of salvation, this is that. It's salvation past because for a lot of us, we can point back to a time or a moment when we first met God.

The third is glorification (don't you love all these fancy words?), which is the End of All Things, when Jesus returns, the dead are raised, and God establishes justice and flourishing for everyone. That's, obviously, salvation future.

[Scripture Slide] Sanctification is that middle part, that "work out your salvation" bit. And sanctification can be tricky to understand. Fortunately, Paul, the guy who wrote "work out your salvation" in the first place, provides a helpful metaphor earlier in that text. So turn with me to Philippians 1.

This is a letter Paul wrote to a church he founded. This letter is essentially one of touching base and encouragement - the Philippian church was struggling in a bunch of those low-grade but difficult ways familiar to many of us: relationship tensions. Financial worries. Paul himself is actually in prison right

now as well, so the whole letter has a strong encouraging tone. This is someone who's in the trenches, writing to his friends and spiritual family also in the trenches, encouraging them to stay the course.

So, early in the letter, Paul gives this piece of advice:

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. -- Philippians 1:27a

Live as citizens of Heaven. Paul uses the metaphor of citizenship to help the Philippians imagine what it means to be saved. And that fits with what we've seen in this series so far - if you were here when we talked about the word Gospel, you remember that the New Testament writers self-consciously referred to Jesus in terms reserved for the Roman Caesar. For them, Jesus is an alternative Caesar, a better son of God. And Jesus' kingdom is radically different from Caesar's. Rather than make peace by killing his enemies (like Caesar), Jesus made peace by *dying for his enemies*.

So it follows, doesn't it, that citizens of Rome and citizens of Jesus' kingdom, the kingdom of Heaven, are going to live very different lives?

Paul asks us to imagine that when we convert to the way of Jesus, that salvation past moment, it's like we moved to the Kingdom of Heaven. We're not in Kansas anymore, so to speak (even though the Chiefs are!). And that move, that citizenship, is free. Jesus aced the citizenship exam for us. He took care of all the paperwork, cut through all the red tape. All we have to do is say Yes and BOOM, we're Heavenites, Jesus people, little Christs (which is what 'Christian' means).

But there's a difference between becoming a citizen and becoming part of the culture. And that's where sanctification comes in. The word literally means "to become holy or sacred". It's how we become like Jesus, like our king. It's how we take on the values of our new king.

And Paul offers a long list of what Heavenites are like - skip down to chapter 2.

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too...

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. -- Philippians 2:1-4, 12-15

[List on the screen] Compassion. Love. Cooperation. Selfless. Humble. Put others ahead of yourself. Be interested in others. Don't complain. Don't argue. Live clean, innocent lives.

Look at that list! Paul says that when we do those things, we shine like lights. Of course we do, because when we immigrate to the Kingdom of heaven, we don't actually *move*. We stay right where we are so that the people around us can see what a little Christ looks like. When we become like Jesus, we shine like stars in the darkness.

Now, I want to address one final apprehension. This can easily sound like a grace-less faith. God's invitation to life is really just a whole bunch of effort, it's just kicked down the road after all.

But look at what Paul promised the Philippians: **God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.**

The best part of immigrating to the Kingdom of Heaven is that God is present in us to sanctify us. God is working with us to work out our salvation. In this project we call salvation present, sanctification, we're not working alone. God is working with us. God gives us the power we need to be changed. God helps us.

Of course that's what God does. God loves us. God rescued us. God will rescue us. And God *is* rescuing us.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] This is the picture of God's rescue.

Put the list of virtues back up

Assignment + Blessing

What virtue is God inviting you to pursue this week?