



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 19, 2023  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 37:1-11](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 42-43

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Romans 8:1-10](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 20:17-28](#)

### **Islands in the Son An Island Filled with People Ready to Serve**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Amen.

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

A good friend of ours from Minnesota, someone we've stayed in touch with all the years we've been here, someone who is (I believe) Wes' sponsor (I could be wrong because I get all the kids confused at times), is someone that we've actually went on trips with a couple of times. He and his wife (every year at this time of the year) go to an all-inclusive resort to the south, not to the north. I don't think it's really an island. I can't remember exactly. But it's the kind of thing (as he described it to me when we talked) that makes me think of being on an island. He talks about being on the beaches and about the surfers and about how they tell you that you aren't supposed to tip, but he says "We always tip because these guys need money and we get incredible service because we tip really well. They are always there waiting to say 'Mr. Mark, do you need something else?'" I guess I can understand that. It's interesting in those conversations that we've had.

But when you stop and think about it, which would you rather be—Mr. Mark, or the guy saying "Mr. Mark, can I get you anything?" That isn't a hard question. We all want to be the one lying on the sand, waiting for someone to wait on us hand and foot. Unfortunately I think sometimes as Christians, because we still have a sinful flesh (as Paul calls it in [Romans 8](#), the sinful nature in us), we kind of approach God that way.

I am convinced there are times that God's people approach God as "You should be doing this or that or that and this for me. You know what? I made it to church Sunday; once a week should be enough for you, God. Why in the world would you expect me to

also be there on a Wednesday to reflect on how you suffered and died for my sins? I have stuff to do.” Sometimes we take for granted who God is and what He has done for us. Paul is culminating with who God is and what He has done for us in [Romans 8](#).

Paul had just gotten done (in [Romans 7](#)) talking about “The good that I want to do, I do not do. The evil I do not want to do, that I keep on doing. ***What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?***” Even though He knows who God is and what God has done for him, he knows he still has that sinful flesh and the things he wants to do to serve God, he still ends up (like you and me) serving self. We aren’t that different from Joseph’s brothers. “What do you mean I have to acknowledge someone else and honor someone else? What do you mean there is someone else in my life more important than me?” We don’t want to hear that.

We had a fascinating Bible study this morning. “How can I love a God who demands worship?” If that’s your approach to God, you’re pretty self-centered. You’re thinking that God is demanding this of you and you’re forgetting all the things God has done for you? Search the Scriptures. I don’t think you’ll ever see God demanding worship. He will encourage us to worship because He knows it’s good for us, but demanding it? There isn’t anybody barking out orders like a drill sergeant.

Look at what Paul says here. ***...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*** He’s saying that right after he admits that “No matter how much I try and because I love God, I want to serve Him, I still don’t do it.” He’s really telling us there is nothing we can offer to God to serve Him so that He would owe us a single thing. What the Law was powerless to do, what our actions are powerless to do, God did. Not because we promise to serve, not because He knew we would serve Him, not because He knew anything about us; He did it because He is loving and gracious and merciful and does not treat us as our sins deserve. What I deserve, what I have earned, my wages, your wages, the wages of everyone in the world is condemnation—***the wages of sin is death***. He said it in [Chapter 6](#). There are no ifs, ands, or buts so that can’t be misunderstood.

And yet, God saw to it that the righteous requirements of the Law are met in us; not BY us, but IN us, because Jesus lived perfectly in our place. Think of how Jesus was so willing to serve. Think of how He served perfectly in your place because you and I don’t. When Jesus was being arrested, Peter draws a sword and cuts off a guy’s ear. Jesus picks it back up and heals it. If I know that the full agony of the cross and wrath of God is about to be poured out on me, that ear could have stayed there. The love, the mercy, the grace of Jesus, in big things and in little things, is absolutely amazing when you stop and consider it! Yet often for us, because we’ve known it most of our lives, we tend to take it for granted as though it’s something God owes us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

God acted in love and mercy to declare us righteous, so now there is no condemnation for us. And now, when we put our eyes on that truth and we find refreshment in this island in the Son that is Jesus Christ, service isn't a have to. Service becomes a want to because we are controlled by the new self in us, if the Spirit of God lives in us. That's what Paul says. If the Spirit of God lives in us, that means we are Christians. The Spirit has given us this gift of faith that Jesus lived and died in our place. When our eyes are focused on that and not on our selfish wants, desires and needs, then serving God and serving others becomes a joy, not a burden.

It's counterintuitive to anything that we would think. We would think if God wanted us to serve Him more faithfully, He would say "Do it or else you're going to hell." Instead our God comes to us and says "I gave you heaven. Now live controlled by that Spirit and love each other and love me and find ways to serve and share that love with yourself, with your fellow believers and with those who don't believe." Find joy in that. Don't whine and mutter about why you have to do it and why it can't be someone else. Do it because it's a way that you express this love for God, who loved you first. This is what it means to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

I am really good, I mean really, really good at living by the flesh. I can whine more than Wisconsin can make cheese to keep up with my whining. That's just the way it is. So I understand living by the flesh. But what I want to do, what I really want to do is get better at living by the Spirit. I want to get better at loving those who aren't going to love me back. ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"*** [\(Luke 23:34\)](#) Jesus said as the hammer echoed in His ears. I can't understand that. Would I love to be able to love like that more? Yes! The only way it is going to be is if I have my eyes focused on the Son and who He is and what He has done for me.

In life, you and I can get so busy we take our eyes off the Son and usually they end up going to a mirror. "How does this affect me?" "This is inconvenient to me." "Really?—you want me to stop what I'm doing to wait on you?" My selfish flesh wants to spray some gasoline and light a match on those kinds of things in my life.

But this is where the grace of God swoops in. He tells us that He loves us and has forgiven us even though we continue to fail Him so often. That Spirit is poured into our hearts as we make faithful use of Word and Sacrament, and then we want to get better at loving others more and serve others with joy, not because we HAVE to but because we WANT to get better at thanking God for the love He showed us first. The more we focus on God, the more we want to do those things, and the more we find joy in it.

In this penitential season of Lent, if we're honest with ourselves, we see often we fail. So it should become all the more incredible, amazing, fascinating, jaw-dropping incredible that our God loves us the way He does. We sure don't deserve it but the more we focus on it, the better we will get at living in response to it, the more we'll be a blessing to

others, the more God will pour love into our hearts and we will be blessed, and the more other people will start looking at the Son, which is ultimately our goal as Christians.  
Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.