Want Proof?
Romans 5:1-8
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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Remember gym class? The gym teacher would choose the two most athletic boys in the class to be the captains and they were then instructed to choose who they wanted on their teams. The strongest and most popular kids were chosen first, until finally down at the bottom of the barrel the class nerd was reluctantly accepted by the captain who had the last pick. If you were among the first ones picked, you were basking in glory. If you were one of the last chosen, you felt humiliated.

This schoolyard behavior is so ingrained in us that television producers are now exploiting this "theme of the strong vs the weak" in popular programs like American Idol, Survivor and Donald Trump's "The Apprentice," which are all about the strong and powerful marginalizing the weak and helpless.

Wouldn't it be horrible if this was the way God chose to deal with us? What if Jesus was like Simon on American Idol ridiculing your best efforts, embarrassing you in front of everybody, or Donald Trump sending you off to hell glibly saying, "**You're fired!**" If God operated that way we'd all be in big trouble.

Thankfully our ways are not God's ways. Read the Bible and you soon discover God is more merciful than we are. He accepts our weakness, and loves us despite our failings. What's more he moved heaven and earth to compensate for our weakness so we can know and enjoy him forever.

Listen again to the Apostle Paul's revelation of the goodness and mercy of God.

"**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed rarely will anyone die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" (Romans 5:6-8)

One of the dangers of being a longtime Christian is taking for granted what once blew us away: God loves us so much he died for us.

Sometimes when someone professes undying love, you're tempted to say, "**Oh really, then prove it.**" You then expect your suitor to show you his or her love is genuine. So you say, "**Spend more time with me, treat me special, like you really love me, put me before anyone else, make me number one in your life.**"

Before we could even think to demand God show us how much he loves us, in the very beginning, even before God created the heavens and the earth, God made the

decision to sacrifice his only son to prove how much he loves us. Again listen to this good news. "**But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.**" (Romans 5:8).

Here's something to ponder. Who would you be willing to die for? Ever think about that? Would you be willing to die in someone else's place? If one of your best friends or a family member was sent to prison for life, and somehow you could take that person's place, would you be willing? Here's another question to ponder. If someone you loved was condemned to hell for all eternity, would you cry out to God, "**Lord, send me instead?**" Now, ponder this: would you be willing to do any of these things for someone who was always hurting you?

This is exactly what Jesus consented to do when he chose the cross. He died in our place, taking with him not only our sin, but all the sins of the world in his body on the cross. His wasn't just physical but spiritual suffering. Every moment on the cross was like spending an eternity in hell. This is what God was willing to put his son through to prove how much he loves you and everyone else.

One of the goals of this sermon is to keep you and me from taking God's amazing grace and love for granted and being oblivious of the suffering God endured, even though we are still sinners. And remember, before going to the cross Jesus didn't demand we first prove our love for him. God didn't say, "**If you be good for me, I'll be good for you.**" Instead God said through his son Jesus, "**Even though you've never proved your undying love for me, I'm going to prove my undying love for you. Even though you are self-centered and blind, I'm going to prove how much I love you by letting you nail me to a cross. Maybe this way I'll get your attention and you'll realize how much I love you.**"

Here's a homework assignment for this week. Take time every day to consider how much God loves you and what he did to prove his love. Think about it, pray about it, and then celebrate it. Doing this is critical if you're ever going to grow in your relationship with God. Pondering God's amazing love means spending time with God, time you are giving him. This time, given to God, is an expression of your love for him as God becomes more real, up-front and personal for you.

Next, consider this. If God loves you, weakness and all, then start to wonder, "How can my weakness bring me closer to God and help me grow in my discipleship? Strange as this may sound, your weakness is what can bring you closer to God. Remember what Jesus said? "**Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick.**" (Matthew 9:12)

If you think you're well, even when you are sick, you're not going to listen to your doctor, even if your life is endangered. How can the doctor heal you? At the same time, if you know you're weak, and you entrust your weakness to God, God will use your weakness as the material to make you brand new.

I'm told that when you break a bone, and the doctor puts it in a cast, when the cast comes off the part of the bone that was broken becomes the strongest part of the bone. That's what God's healing does, the broken part of your life, by the power of God, makes you stronger, wiser, more faithful and more loving.

There's an old Hasidic saying, "**The love of God can only enter through the cracks of a broken heart.**" You see, God chooses to enter through the broken spaces of your life. That's how he gets in, if you let him.

But stepping out of your weakness and into God's strength takes trust. You've got to be willing to trust God with your life. How do you begin to build that trust? Take your focus off all your weaknesses and put it on Jesus.

Ever wonder why lion tamers carry a stool into the cage? When the lion focuses on the four legs of the stool all at once, a kind of mental paralysis comes over it. Likewise when you and I focus on all our problems, our weakness, our sin, we become overwhelmed. That's why it's so important to look above and beyond your weakness until you see Jesus with outstretched arms waiting to embrace you.

"**But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.**" (Romans 5:6)

"**For while we were still weak, at the right time God died for the ungodly.**" (Romans 5:8)

We are weak, ungodly sinners. But God's amazing grace is proven by Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

You are loved, far more than you can ever imagine, and you can begin to experience this love by trusting your life to Jesus.

What's your weakness? Recognize it, even claim it, but above all entrust your life to Jesus. Let God transform your weakness from a stumbling block to a stepping stone that will bring you closer to God. And remember, God's heart was broken too, on the cross, and it is through the cracks of his broken heart that his love seeps out into your broken heart, and by his love we are healed and made stronger and then empowered to pass it on as you become a healed and healing presence in our broken world.

God proves his love for you. Now it's your turn to show your love. Trust your life to him, live your life for him and be forever amazed at how precious you are because God made you for himself.

Let us pray!