

Christ Church, Georgetown
Lent 4 Year B
The Reverend Melissa Hollerith
March 14, 2021

In the name God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bailouts, they were all the rage in the news twelve years ago. GM, Chrysler, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG - everybody needed a bailout. Trillions of dollars were spent to save organizations that we were told would perish without the help of the American taxpayer. The sums of money talked about were really beyond our comprehension. Gifts so large we couldn't wrap our heads around just how big they really were. I have a hard enough time imagining a billion dollars much less a trillion. If a billion is a thousand million, and a trillion is a thousand billion - that's pretty much an unbelievable amount of money. Many thought it was absolutely crazy for us to be giving away so much- especially to companies that seem to have made so many outrageous mistakes. It's like we were rewarding the screw-ups and the failures - and isn't that just wrong?

Well, I don't know enough about finance and banking to make any sort of judgement one way or another about what the Fed and the government were up to, but I find it just a little ironic that as everyone screamed about bailouts, here we sit-you and I- celebrating the biggest bailout of all - God's bailout of humanity. The fact is, there is nothing more Christian than a bailout - not a financial bailout - but a bailout of our very lives. That's what our faith is all about. God loves us so much that God saves us - in spite of ourselves. Without Christ, our faith teaches us, we are dead, finished, over, gone, doomed to disappear like a failed corporation. But with Christ, there is nothing that can really harm us, not even death. This is the good news at the heart of our

lessons for today, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life,” and, “by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

You think it is hard to wrap your head around the idea of a trillion dollars - most Christians never really wrap their heads around what it is exactly that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We keep wanting to hedge it, qualify it, put strings on it, or make it into some kind of earned reward for good behavior. God loves us so much that he is willing to bail us out, not with a boat load of money, but with the life of his beloved Son. How can that be, there has to be some hook, some string attached? How can such a gift really be free?

The wonderful preacher Fred Craddock tells the story of his father, who spent years of his life hiding from the God who was seeking him out: "When the pastor used to come from my mother's church to call on him, my father would say, 'You don't care about me. I know how churches are. You want another pledge, another name, right? Another name, another pledge, isn't that the whole point of church? Get another name, another pledge.'"

“My nervous mother would run to the kitchen, crying, for fear somebody's feelings would be hurt. When we had an evangelistic campaign, the pastor would bring the evangelist (and) introduce him to my father. . . My father would always say the same thing. 'You don't care about me! Another name, another pledge. Another name, another pledge! I know about churches.' I guess I heard it a thousand times. One time he didn't say it. He was at the Veteran's Hospital. He was down to 74 pounds. They had taken out the throat, put in a metal tube, and said, 'Mr. Craddock, you should have come earlier. But this cancer is awfully far advanced. We'll give him radium, but we don't know.'”

“I went in to see him. In every window - potted plants and flowers. Everywhere there was a place to set them - potted plants and flowers. Even in that thing that swings out over your bed they put food on, there was a big flower. There was by his bed a stack of cards 10 or 15 inches deep. I looked at the cards sprinkled in the flowers. I read the cards beside his bed. And I want to tell you, every card, every blossom, every potted plant from groups, Sunday School classes, women's groups, youth groups, the men's bible class, from my mother's church-every one of them. My father saw me reading them. He could not speak, but he took a Kleenex box and wrote something on the side from Shakespeare's “Hamlet” . . . He wrote on the side, 'In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story.' I said, 'What is your story, Daddy?' And he wrote, 'I was wrong.'”

It is not until you know God is seeking you in love, not in condemnation, it is not until that moment, that the gospel becomes Good News for you.

Right or wrong, fair or unfair, what God does for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus, what God gives us as a result - is free. Thanks goodness that God's ways are different from human ways. God bails us out because God loves us, that's the whole story, pure and simple. We haven't earned it, and we can't earn it. We don't deserve it, and we never will. It is gift. The greatest gift ever given.

One of my favorite preachers (King Oehmig) puts it this way, “We are all needy, twisted, and ungodly. Therefore no one has any special claim on God. Grace comes, then, as God's great ‘Nevertheless.’ God in Christ sees *us as we are*, not *as we ought to be*; and in this crystal-clear seeing we are loved *in spite of*. . .” The gift of faith is being able to accept this love of God without qualification. It is the capacity to comprehend God's love of **you** - not your

righteousness, not your humility, not your orthodox faith, not your degrees or your professional status.

As radical as it might sound, we have all been bailed out. God does this purely for the sake of love. All you need to know is that *you are accepted*. Can you hear me, really hear me? *You are accepted*. At this point in Lent, we can take a deep breath of grace, stop for a few minutes and let this truth in. You are accepted, you are loved, you are saved - that's the good news. Amen.