



Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 25, 2021

"Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good."

Romans 12:21 (NLT)

*Call to Worship

Drawing on 1 Peter 2

Come, people of God!

Let us sing the praises of the One who has called us

out of darkness into his marvelous light!

For once we were not a people at all,

but now we are God's people!

God, You can accomplish amazing things

through us as Your people.

Let's worship God together.

*Hymn of Praise

"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"

UMH 715

*Opening Prayer

Lord, we confess that all too often we shrink before the evil of our day. We feel weak to confront the floodtide of darkness. Goodness seems so powerless in the face of such daunting opposition. Remind us, Lord, as we have sung today, that You are the King who reigns. Your purposes will prevail. We can stand secure in Your divine Presence and power. Stir that confidence and strength in us today as we worship. Amen.

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer for God's Spirit to Release the Power of Goodness

Lord, we confess that all too often we shrink before the evil of our day. We feel weak to confront the floodtide of darkness. Goodness seems so powerless in the face of such daunting opposition. Remind us, Lord, as we have sung today, that You are the King who reigns. Your purposes will prevail. We can stand secure in Your divine Presence and power. Stir that confidence and strength in us today as we worship.

Lord, release Your divine power to overcome the strongholds of evil all around us. Give us eyes to see and hearts to see creative ways how goodness can turn the tide or transform the brokenness into healing and forgiveness. Stir our imagination by the stories we hear today that inspire us to be agents of Your goodness in our world as well. We commit ourselves to be those through whom You can keep reaching and touching others in Your Name, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Romans 12:9-21 (NLT)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Message

“Goodness Resists and Overcomes Evil”

Pastor Clark

See Message Below

*Hymn of Faith

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

UMH 110

Blessing

“Go now and follow Jesus in the way of the cross. Rejoice in hope, hold fast to what is good, persevere in prayer. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. As far as is possible, live peaceably with all.”



Romans 12:9-21 (NLT)

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. ²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Rejoice, the Lord Is King

1. Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks and sing,
and triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice; again I say, rejoice.
2. Jesus the Savior reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice; again I say, rejoice.
3. His kingdom cannot fail;
he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of earth and hell
are to our Jesus given.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice; again I say, rejoice.
4. Rejoice in glorious hope!
Jesus the Judge shall come,
and take his servants up
to their eternal home.
We soon shall hear th'archangel's voice;
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

1. A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2. Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

3. And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

4. That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,
thru him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.

“Goodness Resists and Overcomes Evil”

Romans 12:9-21

Introduction

There was a boom, then the house shook. **Daylan McLee** thought for a minute it was a small earthquake until a relative came running inside to say there had been a car crash involving a police cruiser outside the apartment in Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

McLee ran outside and pulled an officer from the mangled patrol car as flames began to spread into the cabin. Police officials and others have credited McLee with saving the officer’s life after the Sunday evening crash. McLee said it wasn’t a complicated decision to help another human being. But even some of his close friends wondered if he hesitated because of his previous interactions with law enforcement officers.

McLee said, *“No. There is value in every human life. We are all children of God and I can’t imagine just watching anyone burn. No matter what other people have done to me, I thought, ‘this guy deserves to make it home safely to his family.’”*

McLee had filed a lawsuit in 2018 against four Pennsylvania State Police troopers for wrongful arrest after he spent a year in jail related to a 2016 fight outside a bar. He had rushed to the bar after his sister called saying she needed a ride home because a fight had broken out. When McLee arrived, he disarmed a man who was standing in the parking lot with a gun and threw the weapon aside.

At least one trooper fired shots at McLee as he fled. The trooper said McLee pointed a weapon at him twice, but security footage showed McLee disarming the man, discarding the gun quickly, and fleeing when shots were fired.

McLee, a Black man, spent a year in jail before a jury acquitted him on the charges after reviewing the video. That was a year away from his children, and a year away from his mother, who was ill at the time. She passed away last year.

But McLee stressed forgiveness, saying he couldn’t blame every police officer for bad interactions he had with any others:

“We need to work on our humanity ... that’s the main problem of this world. We’re stuck on how to get up or to get even, and that is not how I was raised to be. You learn, you live, you move on and I was always taught to forgive big. You can’t base every day of your life off of one interaction you have with one individual. I don’t want to be called a hero. I just want to be known as an individual who is an upstanding man. And I hope (that trooper from the 2016 incident) sees this and knows he’s forgiven.”

That's an amazing example of goodness prevailing over pain and misfortune. This morning we want to explore the power goodness has in overcoming the brokenness and pain and evil of our day.

When I envision how goodness can overthrow evil, I see it as happening in layers. And the best place to start is within our own hearts.

Goodness can prevail when we allow God's grace to help us become good.

"Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the Lord God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed. Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice. Perhaps even yet the Lord God of Heaven's Armies will have mercy on the remnant of his people." Amos 5:14-15 (NLT)

Truly, this is where it all gets started. When we allow God's grace to work in our hearts, we begin to become good! Let's face it, if we don't invite God's transforming grace into our lives, then we become sources, not of goodness, but of selfishness.

Let's face this reality: ***life in this terribly broken world is hard.*** In a world that is cold and hard like ours, it seems to demand that everyone look after his own interests. But that self-orientation only leads to more problems and eventually to a vulnerability to temptation even evil itself. So, the proper beginning point in this whole exploration is in our own hearts. We need God's mercy. We need God's grace for goodness to grow in our hearts!

Dallas Willard in his classic ***The Divine Conspiracy*** capture this with clarity: *"God wants his children to be good people. This means more than trying to act good. God actually wants to transform each of us from the inside out. Goodness does not come from following a checklist of religious "do's and don'ts." It is so much bigger than that. Goodness grows in our hearts and lives when we authentically care about God and others, even ourselves and express that love freely."*

Listen to Jesus in Luke's Gospel (6:43-45):

"A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ⁴⁴ A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."

How readily do you run from evil and run towards God as the prophet Amos reminds us to? Do you know what it feels like to experience the Lord God of Heaven's Armies as your Helper?

Goodness can prevail when we soften the world's harshness.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.

With goodness growing in our hearts, what if we could come to see ourselves as commissioned to soften the world's harshness? What if by the love God fills our lives, we diffuse some of the hardness of this world?

What if God's Spirit stirred within us a desire to serve as shock absorbers? What if we became people through whom He could soften the world's harshness? What if like Jesus, we would absorb some of the world's harshness and cruelty. What if our hearts became an incubator for grace and transforming love?

Alexa Bjornson and her son Landon had made the plane trip several times, from Las Vegas to Portland to visit Landon's father. It had become an annual tradition. But this time, Bjornson was sending Landon to fly solo ... and she was nervous.

Alexa knows that Landon, who is on the autistic spectrum, could sometimes be perceived as an annoyance from other travelers. So, she sent Landon with a goodwill gesture – a note asking for kindness toward her son, \$10 for any potential inconvenience, and her cell phone number.

After the flight touched down in Portland, Bjornson received a text message from Landon's seatmate, passenger **Ben Pedraza**. "I was Landon's seat neighbor for his flight to Portland," Pedraza wrote to Bjornson, along with a selfie of himself posing with Landon. "He did ask if we were there yet several times but he was a great travel buddy. He's a great kid and you're a lucky mom." Pedraza also told Bjornson that he would be donating the \$10 to Autism-Society.org, in honor of Landon.

"I was so relieved," said Bjornson, in a Facebook post that was shared over 130,000 times. "There are good humans on the planet that make him feel like it's OK to be himself and not make him feel like an annoyance." While in Oregon, Bjornson said that Landon and his dad planned to share a meal with Pedraza and his family.

Ben Pedraza softened the harshness of this world a little bit by opening his heart to Landon! I imagine that what Ben did on that flight was not something he expected or something that was convenient. It goes to show us this: *The true measure of our goodness is not how well we do in times of comfort and convenience, but in times of discomfort and inconvenience. Even small acts of kindness can radiate outward when done with a sincere heart and a desire for connection.*

Goodness can prevail when we choose grace and forgiveness.

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

Alexander C. DeJong reminds us what forgiveness involves in this context:

*"To forgive someone involves three things. **First**, it means to forego the right of striking back. One rejects the urge to repay gossip with gossip and a bad turn with a worse turn. **Second**, it means replacing the feeling of resentment and anger with good will, a love which seeks the other's welfare, not harm. **Third**, it means the forgiving person takes concrete steps to restore good relations."*

Victoria Ruvolo, 45, of Lake Ronkonkoma, New York, was selected as the "Most Inspiring Person of 2005" by Beliefnet, and for good reason. Victoria was driving to her niece's voice recital when she passed another car driven by 19-year-old Ryan Cushing. Cushing was riding with five other teens, and had just used a stolen credit card to go on a spending spree. One of their purchases was a frozen turkey, which Cushing decided to toss into oncoming traffic. The 20-pound projectile smashed through Ruvolo's windshield, crushing her face.

Amazingly, Ruvolo survived, although she spent 10 hours in an operating room while doctors repaired her face. When she finally went home, she brought a tracheotomy tube and endured months of painful rehabilitation.

On October 17, 2005, Ruvolo attended Cushing's sentencing and asked his judge for leniency. Part of her statement read: *"Despite all the fear and the pain, I have learned from this horrific experience, and I have much to be thankful for.... Each day when I wake up, I thank God simply because I'm alive. I sincerely hope you have also learned from this awful experience, Ryan. There is no room for vengeance in my life, and I do not believe a long, hard prison term would do you, me, or society any good."*

Cushing, who wept and expressed remorse for his action, was sentenced to six months in jail. He could have gotten a 25-year prison sentence if Ruvolo, his victim, had not intervened.

Ruvolo added: *"I truly hope that by demonstrating compassion and leniency I have encouraged you to seek an honorable life. If my generosity will help you mature into a responsible, honest man whose graciousness is a source of pride to your loved ones and your community, then I will be truly gratified, and my suffering will not have been in vain.... Ryan, prove me right."*

Goodness can prevail when we conquer evil with goodness.

Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ ***Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.***

The astonishing story of how some girls with great faith and courage conquered evil with good!

Joe Parkinson and Drew Hinshaw have extensive experience covering West Africa as reporters for The Wall Street Journal. They are the authors of ***Bring Back Our Girls: The Untold Story of the Global Search for Nigeria's Missing Schoolgirls***. They began their search with the idea that it was the unprecedented media attention triggered by the **#BringBackOurGirls** campaign that caught wind that was the catalyst to the girl's recovery. They came away with an even deeper, more miraculous story at

the heart of this amazing turn of events. As they interviewed some 20 of the young women, they discovered something about the beating heart of this story that much of the foreign coverage had missed. We saw clearly how the teenagers' will to survive was inseparable from their religious convictions. Most of the students were Christians.

Members of the class of 2014 at **Nigeria's Chibok Government Secondary School for Girls** had been just a few weeks from finishing their senior year—just a few weeks from graduating as some of the only educated young women in an impoverished region where most girls never learned to read. It was a Monday. The students had spent the afternoon finishing a three-hour civics test and the evening relaxing on campus, studying in their dorms, or gathering in small circles in the prayer room. Some had been singing cathartic *sabon rai*, or “*reborn soul*,” hymns that they had rehearsed since childhood at Chibok's exultant Sunday services.

Suddenly, a group of militants barged in, bundled nearly 300 girls onto trucks, and sped into the forest. The students became captives of a little-known terrorist group called **Boko Haram**, which filled its ranks by abducting children. The girls' parents chased after them on motorbikes and on foot until the trail went cold. For weeks, few people seemed to notice. The schoolgirls looked set to be forgotten, new entries on Nigeria's long list of stolen youth.

These young women had endured **three years of captivity, deprivation, and pressure to convert** to Boko Haram's creed by **holding onto their friendships and their faith**. At the risk of beatings and torture, they whispered prayers together at night, or into cups of water, and memorized the Book of Job from a smuggled Bible. Into secret diaries, they copied Luke 2, because they saw themselves in Mary's ordeal of giving birth to Jesus. They transcribed paraphrases of psalms in loopy, teenage handwriting: “*Oh my God I keep calling by day and You do not answer. And by night. and there is no silence on my part*” (22:2).

Long story short, many of those girls survived and even thrived in those oppressive conditions because of one thing: their faith made them strong in the face of unspeakable evil. Actually as part of their Muslim indoctrination, they were given journals for writing. They, however, used them for journaling about their experience.

- First they wrote about the abduction...
- Then they wrote about praying to escape...
- Then their journaling turned toward the will to survive the brutal conditions...
- Then their journaling shifted to their faith in the face of this ordeal...

Joe and Drew would later report: Later, one of the leaders among the girls, Naomi began to recount anecdotes to us, recalling a story of courage in the face of horrors that sounded fantastical in their depravity. Nevertheless, after many hours of interviews with the young women held in captivity, it became clear that her account often understated the schoolgirls' bravery. Naomi and her friends had

no reason to believe they would survive their ordeal and every expectation that each challenge to their captors' worldview would result in physical and mental punishment. They stuck to their principles all the same, staging a rebellion that signaled their determination to persevere. "We stood our ground," as Naomi later told us.

These Wall Street journalists found a courageous perspective in a group of young women who had faced unimaginable hardship and survived. Their faith provided twin anchors of identity and hope during a period when their captors were trying to erase both. Repeatedly they were told their parents were dead, their places of worship were torched, and their community was now flying Boko Haram's black-and-white flag. But faith became the language of their resistance. Their regular fasts transfigured hunger into a source of strength, as they took turns renouncing food for a few days to create a spiritual energy they believed would help free them.



A Look Ahead

The following is a sketch of some of the highlights in the coming months. More details for each event will follow.

August 15 ***Tom Helber*** preaching as Clark and Kim are away

September 12 ***Grandparent's Sunday***

September 19 ***Outdoor Worship and Church Wide Picnic*** at Home of Paul Owens

September 19 Start of ***Season Two of The Chosen*** at Faith Church

October 1-2 ***Trash and Treasure Sale*** at Hope Church

October TBD ***Chili-Cook Off and Game Night*** at Faith Church

November TBD ***Operation Christmas Child Gathering*** at Faith Church

November 21 Hope and Faith ***Thanksgiving Dinner*** at Hope Church

November 28 ***Advent Season Begins***

December 11 ***Cookies and Candy Sale*** at Hope Church

December 19 ***Christmas Cantata***

December 24 ***Christmas Eve Services***

