

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

March 15, 2015

*“You Are Saved”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister  
LouAnne Fraser: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

**Ephesians 2:4-9**

*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

**John 3:16-18**

*‘For 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. ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

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“You Are Saved”

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Two women who attend two different churches are bragging about their preachers. The first woman says, “My minister can preach for 20 minutes about anything.” The second woman says, “Big deal. My minister can preach for 20 minutes about nothing.”

You are saved. That’s what I want to talk with you about today. You are saved. Whether you’re Protestant or Catholic. Whether you’re Pentecostal or Presbyterian. Whether you’re Evangelical or Episcopalian. You are saved. Whether you’re Mennonite or Methodist. Whether you’re Reformed Church in America or Christian Reformed Church. Whether you’re Church of Christ or United Church of Christ. You are saved. Whether you were

baptized as an infant or an adult. Whether you take Communion every week or every month. Whether you pray in public or in private. You are saved. (Say to those around you: You are saved. You are saved. You are saved.)

Clara Fredenberger is 100 years old. She's one of the founding members of this church, so she's been a member here for 53 years. In her younger days she was very involved in this church. Kathleen and I visit her about once a month, often taking her communion. She's always interested in hearing about the church. She gets the newsletter every month. She lives in a spotless apartment and she's always immaculately dressed. Clara Fredenberger is saved. And you are saved. I believe that, because the Bible tells me so.

John 3:16. That's the biblical citation - Book, Chapter, and Verse - that sports fans are probably familiar with, if they watch enough television. John 3:16 is on a sign in the crowd at professional golf tournaments. John 3:16 is on a sign at major league baseball games, usually behind home plate. John 3:16 is on a sign at National Football League games and is often painted on players' faces, under their eyes. When people look up the verse in the Bible, which I assume some do, they read that, "For 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." I like the first part of that verse, "For God so loved the world," which tells me that God loves the world that God created. God does not hate the world that God created. God does not despise the world that God created. God does not condemn the world that God created. God loves the world that God created. And I believe God wants us to treat the world that God created with love, respect, and reverence. How much does God love the world that God created? So much, "that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." So, if you believe in Jesus, you are saved.

"Believe in" Jesus. What does that mean exactly? Some theologians say it means to "believe in" the idea that Jesus is the only Son of God. Some theologians say it means to "believe in"

the idea that Jesus died for our sins on the cross. Some theologians say it means to “believe in” the virgin birth of Jesus. Some theologians say it means to “believe in” the resurrection of Jesus. And some theologians say that to “believe in” Jesus means to “believe in” all of those things. Now I’m not a theologian (and I don’t play one on TV), but it seems to me that whatever way you “believe in” Jesus, I think you also have to follow the teachings of Jesus. “Love your neighbor.” “Love your enemies.” “Forgive and you will be forgiven.” “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” If you do all that, it seems to me, you are saved.

Ephesians, however, says you are saved, not by anything you do, you are saved by God’s grace alone. Ephesians says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Why would God save people by grace, and not by works? The Psalmist seems to answer that question by saying, “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” Merriam-Webster defines “steadfast” as: “not subject to change.” So God’s love for us is unchangeable and lasts forever. And that’s why God saves us through God’s grace. Then in 1 John we read, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” God did not create you to hate you. God created you to love you. God is a Supreme Being. God is not a supreme bully. Therefore, I believe, you are saved.

Maybe you have loved ones who you think are not saved, because they don’t “believe in” Jesus. Maybe you have loved ones who reject Jesus. Will your loved ones be saved? Will your loved ones live in heaven for all eternity? Well, when you “believe in” Jesus, aren’t you doing something? And isn’t that “works,” about which you “may boast.” (“Hey, look at me. I

believe in Jesus. Aren't I a good person?") And doesn't Ephesians say that we are saved by God's "grace" alone, and not by anything we do? While you're thinking about that, think about this: which is worse, rejecting Jesus, or rejecting and crucifying Jesus? And what did Jesus say about those who not only rejected him, but also crucified him? You probably remember that as Jesus was hanging from the cross, he looked at those who put him there - who both rejected him and crucified him - and said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." If Jesus was willing to forgive those who rejected and crucified him on the cross, why would he be less willing to forgive those who simply reject him today, but did not crucify him on the cross? Maybe those who reject Jesus today are saved. I present that to you as something to think about. All I know is, you are saved.

Carlton Pearson, several years ago, was a fundamentalist preacher in Tulsa. Carlton Pearson preached that you had to "believe in" Jesus to be saved. Carlton Pearson had a 5,000 member church and he was considered the heir apparent to Oral Roberts. Then one day Carlton Pearson was watching the news. A story came on about children starving to death in Africa. Carlton Pearson thought: Wait a minute. Those kids probably don't "believe in" Jesus, because they probably never heard of Jesus. Does that mean they won't go to heaven when they die? Then Carlton Pearson started questioning whether God would refuse to send those kids to heaven just because they didn't "believe in" Jesus. Which brings up the flip side of that question. If Hitler professed to "believe in" Jesus, would Hitler go to heaven? Then Carlton Pearson started preaching that God sends everybody to heaven. That's when Carlton Pearson's 5,000 member church dwindled down to next to nothing and he lost his church. But he was welcomed into a different denomination. Can you guess which denomination welcomed Carlton Pearson into it? The United Church of Christ. As a United Church of Christ minister myself, I believe those kids in Africa are saved. I believe Carlton Pearson is saved. And I believe you are saved.

Jesus died for all of us. That's what we say we believe. Do we

mean that? Or do we mean that Jesus died for just some of us? Timothy says, Jesus “is the Savior of all people.” John says, Jesus “takes away the sin of the world!” And 1 John says, Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice...for the sins of the whole world.” Don’t get me wrong. I believe Jesus is the way to heaven. But if he died for everyone, didn’t he die for the people who reject him as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God? If not, does that mean Jesus died for the person who commits murder, but who professes to “believe in” Jesus? But not for the person who commits random acts of kindness, if that person does not profess to “believe in” Jesus? I believe that’s crazy. And I believe that God is not crazy. So I believe everyone in the whole world is saved. And I believe you are saved.

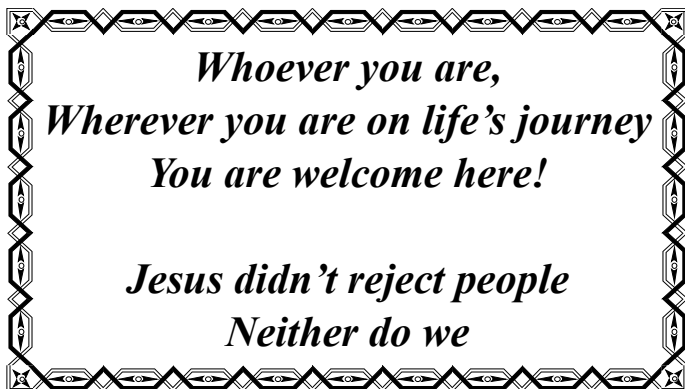
W.C. Fields, the great, old-time comedian and movie star, was an atheist. But when he was dying, a friend of his stopped by his house. W.C. Fields was in bed, poring through the Bible. His friend asked him, “What are you doing?” W.C. Fields said, “Looking for loopholes.” I believe heaven would not be heaven without W.C. Fields in it. So I believe W.C. Fields, the atheist, is saved. For all eternity. In heaven. Since we’re all children of God, since we’re all made in God’s image, since we’re all loved by God, and not only that, since we’re all descendants of Adam, since we’re all descendants of Noah, since we’re all descendants of Abraham, how could God not send any of us to heaven? This church hosted an interfaith service last November. And we probably will do that again in the future. And I can’t take part in an interfaith service, if I secretly think that Christians are the only ones who get to go to heaven. Religion is not a competition - like the Detroit Tigers and the Los Angeles Dodgers - where there are winners and losers. In religion, everyone is a winner. Whether someone is a Christian or a Jew. Whether someone is a Buddhist or a Hindu. Whether someone is a Muslim or a What-Have-You. They are saved. For all eternity. In heaven. And I believe you are saved. For all eternity. In heaven.

Barbara Otto, as you probably know, died last Saturday. She was 75. We did her memorial service yesterday. Her husband, Chuck, met her in 1980. He told me it was, “absolute love at first

sight.” She had three daughters and nine grandkids. She and Chuck also took in many troubled kids. Barbara was also an artist. Their home is filled with her creations. Chuck said they were both raised in the congregational church. They joined this church in 2009. Barbara helped out in the office and in the church on Sundays. Chuck said it was because she was “a people person.” Chuck told me, “There’s no doubt in my mind that she’s in heaven.” There’s no doubt in my mind either. If heaven exists, and I believe it does, then I believe that Barbara Otto is there. Because Barbara Otto is saved. And you are saved.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to know that we are saved.  
Help us to know that everyone is saved.  
And help us to proclaim that Good News.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*



***Whoever you are,  
Wherever you are on life’s journey  
You are welcome here!***

***Jesus didn’t reject people  
Neither do we***

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism