

Oh, Come, All Ye Unfaithful

Titus 3:3-7 (NIV)

³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Hopefully, many of you, if not all of you, here tonight saw our Christmas postcard. If you got it, did your brain fill in what you knew should be there, that the song is called, “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful” and that’s what you sing on Christmas Eve? Or did you do a double take, thinking that this church has really bad proofreaders and they obviously typo’ed their postcard in one of the worst ways possible? Did you ignore the unfaithful part? Think that it didn’t apply to you, that it was for other people? Or were you intrigued by it and wanted to see where these Light of the Valley folks are going with it, why this invitation went out to the unfaithful? Isn’t church for the faithful?

What are churches for? Are they the places where the good people gather - the people who have it all together, the people who are blessed, who are successful, have good jobs, a robust family, seemingly have no troubles, no worries, are good all the time? Are churches museums of saints, that the holiest of holy people come here, who never question church teachings, who always give 10%, who never complain about church, that these are the people on display here for their faithfulness?

If that were the case, I shouldn’t be here. God demands faithfulness from me at all times, and I haven’t been. I know that there are people that I wasn’t there for in their time of need. There are people that I did not stay loyal to, that I stopped associated with them, being friends with them. I have not been faithful in being patient with people, in always contacting our members, reaching out to them, confronting their spiritual issues that I see in their lives. I know that I have shied away from uncomfortable conversations instead of engaging them, having my lips sealed instead of being open to declare the Word of God to people. I also haven’t always done what I said I was going to do for my family. I didn’t call when I said I would. I didn’t leave work when I said I would. I know that I should have responded and reacted with kindness, but I responded and reacted with anger or indifference. I have been unfaithful.

How about you? If your life one of total faithfulness to God? Have you ever missed any church services that you honestly could have come to? Have you ever told any white lies to your spouse because you didn’t want to hurt their feelings? Did you always speak up for your friend when others were enumerating their unattractive traits and shortcomings? How about doing that for your enemies? Did you speak up and defend them, always show love to them? Have you diligently worked every minute that you claimed on your timecard? Have you ever failed to complete a school assignment on time and with perfect marks every time? Have you always respectfully submitted to our government’s laws and leaders? Have you always faithfully listened to and obeyed your parents? Parents, have you always lovingly and carefully disciplined your kids, never blowing up at them, never making an unfair judgment based on your emotions? As the list goes on, are you silently suffering in your struggle to be faithful as God demands?

When you read through the Bible, did you know that you’re much harder pressed to find great heroes of faith who were ceaselessly and unrelentingly faithful? The Bible is not a museum of faithful saints but rather a litany of unfaithfulness. Adam & Eve kicked it off. They had one job to not do, to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they were unfaithful. Noah, as righteous as he was, joined the ranks of the drunkards after the flood. Abraham lied about his wife being his sister not once, but twice. Great King David was an adulterer, a murderer, and a bad father. King Ahaz, the descendant of David we heard about in our first Bible reading tonight, was unfaithful to God, testing God’s patience by not asking for a sign of his upcoming deliverance when God specifically told him to. He was even more unfaithful as he sacrificed his children to idols and built an idol’s altar and put it in place of the Lord’s altar at his temple. Paul who wrote this letter to a pastor named Titus was someone who persecuted Christians, sought them out to arrest them and deliver them over to death, trying to destroy God’s church. Then you have the people that Titus is a pastor to. This is how they were described. “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.” (verse 3) They really were Cretans, from the island of Crete. And the great Apostle Paul lumped himself in with all that unfaithfulness. The Bible has never hesitated to report all the unfaithfulness of those who were supposed to be faithful to God. In that way, we fit right in.

What did God do with all these unfaithful people? He appeared in kindness and in love. The word that is translated as love here is where we get the word “philanthropy.” It literally means, “One who loves people.” God loves people. Why? They’re so unfaithful!

We are so unfaithful! That's right. Yet God chooses to love us. For love to be love, it must be freely given with no strings attached. That's what God does for us. And that love for us isn't limited to a feeling. His love for people led him to take action, even as we are unfaithful.

Immediately upon Adam & Eve's unfaithfulness, God promised to crush the devil, to rescue them from his clutches, to do everything needed to restore their once faithful relationship. He kept his promise to Noah to preserve his life, even when Noah stumbled around drunk. He kept his promise to Abraham to make his descendants great and that through him all nations would be blessed with Jesus coming from his family line even when Abraham was unfaithful to the truth – both times. God kept his promise even when David was lazy, lusted, lied, murdered and yet God still brought the King of Kings from David's family line. God faithfully loved Paul even when Paul tried to destroy all of God's children. God faithfully loved the Cretans even though they were Cretans, disobedient, ruled by passions, being hated and hating one another. And God faithfully loves you as shown by the fact that Christmas happened. God's love for us is faithful even when we are unfaithful, even when we are faithless.

The Bible is not a museum of faithful saints and neither are churches. We are deeply flawed, unfaithful, deplorable, Cretan sinners. And God still faithfully loves us and that is on full display as we come to Christmas. He came into our world on the very first Christmas to save us from our unfaithfulness. He was faithful to his promises. Jesus, true God who took on human flesh and blood, was faithful to all people. He was faithful to God, obeying all of his laws at all times, loving him with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. He was faithful to his parents, always listening to them, respecting them. He was faithful to his friends, even when they all ran away from him. He was faithful to the government of his day, paying taxes and respecting even a pagan Caesar. He was faithful to his enemies, continuing on in his faithfully perfect life so that his petition for them to forgive them for their sins, their unfaithfulness, would be answered because of the payment of his perfect life on the cross.

In his faithfulness, God "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." (verses 5-6) By his generous and faithful love for us, he gave us a new life covered with his faithfulness, with him having checked all the boxes of faithfulness for us so that God views us as being perfectly faithful right now. He did all the work. He made us. He gave us a new life. None of it was based on our faithfulness, our best efforts, our righteous acts. He was completely faithful to us to cover us with his complete faithfulness.

So we are saved. Saved from what? Saved from a life separated from God. Saved from the miserable and eternal torment in hell, a life we caused by our unfaithfulness. By God's faithfulness, we have been brought into his family and been crowned with the riches of his faithfulness. He has declared us not guilty of our sins, of all the ways that we have been unfaithful. They are wiped from our account. God the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts to believe that Jesus' faithfulness is our faithfulness. This means that we will get to live with Heavenly Father forever. He holds no good thing back from us but gives us the very best he has to offer because Jesus was faithful for us in our place.

That's why we have come here tonight, not because we are so faithful, but because God is so faithful to us even when we are unfaithful. The church is not the place only for the faithful, the worthy, that they earned the right to be here, that we are putting their faithfulness on display. No, church is a hospital for sinners. We have come here because we are the unfaithful. We have come weary and unstable, barren and waiting, weary of praying, bitter and broken, fears unspoken, guilty and hiding, running from God, having nothing. We ran from God, but God faithfully ran after us, to save us, to fix us, to cover us with his faithfulness.

This is the joy of Christmas. We have come here as the unfaithful. We leave tonight as the faithful, not because we made the trip. We leave faithful because God has been completely and perfectly faithful for us, substituting his faithfulness for our unfaithfulness. We are reborn, washed clean, made us new. We are the faithful because God was faithful for us. Amen.