**Sermon 3/10/19**

**Romans 6:1-14**

Don Richardson spent several frustrating years among the Sawi tribe in New Guinea.

He had come from America as a missionary,

        hoping to bring the Christian message to a nearly stone-age tribe.

But his message kept colliding with the tribe's unusual beliefs.

Christian values of love and forgiveness, had no appeal to the Sawi,

       for they held up deceit as the highest virtue.

They saw no reason to change their patterns of cruelty and cannibalism.

In fact, when Richardson told them the story of Jesus,

       only one incident sparked their interest: the story of the betrayal of Judas!

To the Sawi, Judas was a genuine hero. He had shrewdly penetrated the trusted

       inner circle of disciples before turning against Jesus.

Every time Richardson tried to share Jesus with the Sawi, the attempt miscarried.

Finally, after watching the 14th bloody battle fought outside his home,

        Richardson reached the end of his patience.

How could he ever break through to such violent people?

He decided to leave New Guinea, in spite of the Sawi's pleas that he stay.

Just before Richardson left, the Sawi and their deadly enemies,

           the Haenam tribe, staged an elaborate ceremony in front of his home.

It was their final effort to convince the missionary to stay.

The entire village gathered to watch the event.

All were silent except the Sawi chief's wife.

            She screamed loudly as the chief seized their 6 month-old baby

            from her arms and held him high in the air.

Then the chief carried his son to the enemy chief

         and gave his own child to his enemy.

A member of the tribe explained to Richardson that the Haenam tribe

        would rename the baby and raise him as one of their own.

Richardson knew no Sawi could be fully trusted,

        since any action might be part of an elaborate deception.

But that memorable day he learned of the one great exception: the Peace Child.

A chief's giving his own son to his enemies – that profound, painful act,

            would overcome all suspicion.

By mutual agreement, as long as the Peace Child lived,

        no wars could be fought between the two tribes.

They could experience peace in their lives.

Something clicked in Don Richardson's mind as he watched the spectacle.

At last he had found an analogy – a parallel story – built into the Sawi's culture

           which could convey the message of a forgiving God.

He gathered members of the tribe around him and

            with a pounding heart and dry throat, told them of God's Peace Child.

God had sent his own Son, Jesus, to live among his enemies,

         to make peace with humankind.

The Sawi tribe finally began to understand Richardson's God.

The story of God's Peace Child caught their imagination and they began

        to understand, and accept what he had tried so hard to teach them.

They admired this wonderful God who offered his own Son as the Peace Child,

          who lived among his enemies to teach them of God is great love for them.

Perhaps Paul felt that same pounding heart and dry throat as he presented the story

               in his letter to Romans: the meaning of God's offering of his peace child Jesus.

The first part of his letter to the Romans spelled out the vast separation

            between God and people.

Now Paul describes how God spanned this gulf.

Christ's death was not a new idea, an addition to the Old Testament law.

Rather, it was the completion of the law,

           what the Old Testament implied and foreshadowed.

Like the Sawi, the Jewish culture had its own redemptive analogies;

     and they found true fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul was trying to be a good person by keeping all the law in his own strength,

          he was ultimately defeated by the sin problem.

Although his intentions were good,

        he was attempting to win the battle over sin by his own plan and ability.

There is only one solution to that kind of struggle.

Paul concludes at the end:

          “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

         Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The very best proof of the Christian faith is a believer with a changed life,

          and Paul's life changed completely.

Paul calls Christians to "Consider yourselves dead to sin,

            and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

And he wrote as if this were really possible.

In Romans, Paul constructs a step-by-step argument much like a legal brief,

                 as shown by his frequent use of the legalese word "therefore".

Step One:   No one is righteous and we all need help.

Step Two:  God has provided that help in the form of his Son, making peace with us.

Step Three: Therefore, God no longer condemns those who are in Christ.

Therefore, we all need to admit our ungodliness, and accept that we need God.

We must give ourselves up completely, and give our lives to God alone.

We need to believe God through faith, that God is more than willing,

             and more than able, to save us from our sins.

Then we will be able to live a "living faith" and experience his love and forgiveness.

Anna was a young girl in college who was struggling to understand God.

She wanted to be right with God, but she knew she were missing the mark.

She had gotten caught up in some things of the world

       which she just couldn't seem to shake.

Anna felt as if God did not love her, or approve of her, and probably never would.

She felt as if her life was a total waste.

No matter how hard she tried, she was never good enough.

Her unhappiness and frustration brought her down into the depths

     of deep clinical depression, and intense anxiety.

She could barely function.

She had become suicidal.

She nearly gave up.

Then one day she was walking through a music store on the college campus.

She heard a familiar song playing in the store.

It was a Billy Joel song, "I love You Just the Way You Are".

She stopped and listened, really listened, to the words.

She felt as if God were talking directly to her through this song.

Slowly she began to realize there was nothing she could do

          which could make God love her any more than He already does.

Listening to the song Anna realized God did love her, sins and all.

For the first time in her life, she knew God loved her – just the way she was.

Anna began to realize he loved her so much, he sent his only Son

    into the world to save her.

He took her sins upon Himself, and died for her,

        to free her from the condemnation which comes from the law.

Listening to the song in the music store, she began to believe, really believe,

         God loved her just the way she was.

That realization changed everything, slowly at first.

Her unhappiness and frustration gradually faded away.

She no longer wished to commit suicide, and she was able to function again.

Gone were the clinical depression, and intense anxiety.

Her acceptance and belief in God's love, grace, and mercy, changed her life.

Now she is at peace. She has joy in her heart.

No matter what happens each day she believes in God,

           in his love, in his presence with her.

She believes God loves her very much, and she loves him.

We cannot do it all by ourselves.

We need God’s help.

And when we accept his love and forgiveness and help,

                it makes all the difference in our lives,

                and in the world.

AMEN