

Draw Near **2 Corinthians 20b-6:10**

INTRODUCTION

After spending 25 years as an attorney, Bob Goff gave up his law practice to become a bestselling author and podcast personality. In one of his books, he tells the story of the time he and his friend Brandon were in Washington DC on business and found themselves near Capitol Hill around midnight.

They saw a bunch of barricades and awkwardly parked cars around the Library of Congress so they decided to investigate. In so doing, they discovered they had come upon the set for the filming of National Treasure 2, starring Nicholas Cage. Not wanting to miss out, they ran back their hotel rooms, and exchanged their suits and ties for blue jeans and t-shirts in an attempt to appear like they were part of the film crew. They then went back, worked their way to the entrance where the crew went in and walked right in as if they belonged there.

As they entered, a guard standing by the metal detector demanded to know, "Where are your crew badges?" We don't have them. He mumbled something about inept crew members but then waved them through. That night they watched the filming of the scene where the actors were looking for the Presidential book of secrets.

Reflecting later on that experience, Bob wrote:

There are a lot of things I don't get invited to. I've never been invited to the Oscars or Paul McCartney's birthday or to a space shuttle launch. If I got an invitation to any of those, I would definitely go, because there is no feeling like being included.

There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down all the time. Every day when I wake up, I get the invitation to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day.

Nobody turns down an invitation to the White House but I have seen plenty of people turn down an invitation to fully live.

This Lenten season we are going to focus on another invitation ...

- One that is also extended to you daily,
- One that is waiting for you every morning you when you awake and offered multiple other times throughout your day
- One that comes with its own temptations to turn it down every time it is extended

This invitation found in our theme verse for this Lenten Season, James 4:8:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

Over these next forty days as we journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, toward His death, burial and resurrection, we want to hear that invitation clearly and respond to it positively. Our challenge during this Lenten season is to DRAW NEAR to the cross.

- To help remind us of this invitation, we have added another cross to our chancel throughout this season. It will be a reminder of God's invitation. This cross was built by Dean Settles. Robert Thompson created the stand for it. The cross will play an important part in our worship service on Good Friday.
- On Sunday mornings, we will use the readings from the Revised Lectionary (as we do each week) and learn about what we will EXPERIENCE as we draw near.
- Each Thursday, and again on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, we will meet one of the characters of the Biblical narrative and discover an aspect of faith from them.

So in this – and every – Lenten season, all who are far away – and that's all of us – are invited to DRAW NEAR. The Apostle Paul restates that invitation in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:20:

We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

As you DRAW NEAR in these days, be sure to ...

#1: DRAW NEAR ... HUMBLY

Look at verse 21:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The ultimate goal of every Lenten season is to prepare our hearts for the good news of Easter. But to truly appreciate the good news that CHRIST HAS RISEN, we first have to come to face-to-face with the very unsettling bad news. We have to understand that:

- Jesus died a brutal death – a death that was rightfully ours. That wonderful passage in Isaiah 53 spell that out clearly:

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering...
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities ... (Isaiah 53:4-5)

- The depth of brokenness in our relationship with God.
 - The only reason for an invitation to "draw near" is that we are no longer near!

But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

Only we fully understand how bad our situation was without Christ can we experience Easter as we ought. As we often say,

If you don't weep on Good Friday, you can't really rejoice on Easter Sunday.

So as you DRAW NEAR be sure to do so HUMBLY. You will also want to DRAW NEAR ...

#2: DRAW NEAR ... CONFIDENTLY

Look at verse 1:

We urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. (2 Corinthians 6:1)

Another version of the Bible says it like this:

Please don't squander one bit of this marvelous life God has given us. (2 Corinthians 6:1, The Message)

How do you squander the grace of God? There are two key ways that can happen:

1. To take it for granted. That is, to not fully appreciate what has done in the events of Easter. We talked about that just a few moments ago.
2. To allow doubts to creep into your beliefs.
 - Those doubts might come from outside sources. The world wants to call everything about our faith into question:
 - Would a God of love really condemn someone to hell?
 - I think there are many ways to get to heaven.
 - Who are you to impose your beliefs on me?
 - In Paul's case, he was also warning his readers not to trust any other source (e.g., their Jewish traditions) – It's not Jesus plus anything else.
 - The doubts might also come from within.
 - Could God really love me?
 - Why does it feel like my prayers go unheard?
 - Where is God when I need Him?
 - Why would God let that happen to me?

The invitation to DRAW NEAR is, in part, an invitation toward assurance. The closer you are to the cross, the less those kinds of doubts impact you.

#3: DRAW NEAR ... EXPECTANTLY

Look at verse 2:

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

God wants to do something in these days. Amazing things happen when you come to the cross. Lives are changed as you DRAW NEAR to the cross.

Steve was a young Christian when he got a job at the local paper mill. Working with him there was an older man was a very dedicate Christian. He was the greatest guy Steve had ever known. In the course of time this man asked Steve if he was a Christian, and Steve quickly responded, "Yes."

But one day Steve said some words that hurt this older man. Before he knew it, those words had come rushing out of his mouth, cutting like a knife. As soon as he said them he knew he was wrong, but it was too late. They had already been spoken. He walked away in shame, too stubborn to apologize.

Steve dreaded to face his friend the next day, but when he saw him, he got up the courage to that he was sorry for what he had said. The older man smiled, and replied, "I don't remember you saying anything hurtful, but let me ask you a question. Are you living your life at the foot of the cross?"

Steve says that in that moment "Conviction ate me alive and I answered with words I hated to admit: NO, I'M NOT." But from this day forward, I will.

Today is the day, Paul writes. The cross is the place. So let us DRAW NEAR.

Amen.