

*So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*6As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! 3We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

When I was a teenager, I spent the month of June with a hoe in my hand. My brother, Richard, my cousin Johnny and I would walk up and down the rows of corn. The ears of corn missed in the last year's harvest were buried with the plowing of the land. By June the kernels on those ears had sprouted and grown into a cluster of corn stalks. Our task was to dig those clumps of growing corn out of the ground.

We worked hard - every hour or so we would take a break.

Sometimes we threw small pebbles at each other to pass the time of our break. If a mulberry tree was nearby we'd have a snack. But our favorite entertainment of all was the ladybug pit.

A ladybug would be found - a small pit created. The sides had to be steep, the soil loose and sandy. We would place the ladybug into the bottom of the pit and watch. The ladybug would begin to climb, higher and higher, then the sand would give way, and the ladybug would fall to the bottom. Again she would start out, again she would fall. If the soil was right the sides sufficiently steep, this pattern was repeated again and again.

Do you think God is like three boys entertaining themselves at a ladybug's expense? Is life the pit into which we have been placed - God's law the sand which seems to offer a way out, but which repeatedly fails us, causing us to tumble back to the bottom again and again?

Maybe your life seems like this to you: God expects you to be perfect. You try - you fail, - God forgives - you start again. You try - you fail - God forgives - you start again.

“We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves,” we confess. We don't mean to lose our temper, to stubbornly hold onto a grudge, to withhold our help from the poor. We don't plan to ignore the needs of those around us, to never see the pleading for help in another's eyes. We do not intend to get so busy with our own needs that we forget about God, and giving thanks.

Today begins the season of Lent. Some have done something different during Lent. Tired of the climbing and the falling, they set a different standard than God's law, an achievable standard. No candy, no meat, no this or that. They keep the standard they have set, they feel good about themselves.

Today begins the season of Lent. I think of the ladybug.

All the while the ladybug was crawling and falling, she had another capacity she did not even use. She could fly. Her prison was no prison at all. She could fly and leave the pit and the sand and get on with living. But he did not. He would not.

What if God has absolutely no interest in our trying to climb out of ourselves with his law? What if God has no interest in our goodness, our sinlessness, our keeping standards of God's making or ours? What if God is not the one who puts us down in that pit, but we put ourselves there?

Paul writes: *“We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Jesus is God giving us wings to leave behind this preoccupation with self, with our righteousness, our worthiness. Out of the pit we fly and off to help our neighbor. We become the righteousness of God not in our striving - our trying - our goodness, but in Christ. You are not on trial, God is not waiting for you to climb to some level of Goodness, you are free: sent into the world to love.

You are free, this is where Lent begins. You are forgiven for Jesus sake - not because of your sorrow, or how hard you try, but through Jesus. God made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Forget about yourself and see your neighbors need. God has given you the wings to fly to your neighbor. God will empower you to be a blessing in the life of your neighbor.

Paul writes: *“As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you , and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’ See, now is the acceptable time, see, now is the day of salvation.”*

Now.

Now is the moment to fly to your neighbor. Now the time to leave the pit of self-righteousness, and self-absorption and self-controlling, and to fly to your neighbor in need. Let your Lent this year be spelled LOVE.