

Matt and I were by the stream on hole number 6 at Willow Creek, on our way to the green. Next to us, there was a splash. I looked down to see an orange golf ball now resting on the bottom. I looked back to see the golfer behind us who had just earned himself a penalty stroke with that shot, and also my anger. Though the ball had almost struck us, he had not yelled fore. When I reached the green, my brother in law asked if we should let the twosome behind us play through. No, I said. He almost hit ~~me~~ with that last shot. If he is not going to be courteous, than neither will I be. Let them wait. And that was that.

But as they waited for each shot on the next three holes, I thought of how easily I had roped off that golf course as a place where the faith I proclaim in this place did not need to follow me. Forgiveness, reconciliation these are the words that I speak here, but justice, giving them what they deserve, is the rule I live by there.

~~It is as if~~ I erect a fence around a small portion of my life, and I say, I will let my Christianity graze there. Inside that fence the grass is cropped short, all appears neat and in control. But outside everything is left wild. Anger, revenge, giving people what I ~~think~~ think they deserve rather than ~~me~~ what they need, just doing what I feel like doing, that's how it is outside the fenced in area. In my work, in the church I am one person, a Christian out there in the world I live like all the rest.

I suppose it is a small thing to be angry on the ~~golf~~ golf course, but it is no small thing when I want to narrow down my faith. For what God is doing in Jesus Christ is not narrow and confined, but stretched wide, wider than we can imagine. In all of scripture nowhere is this made so clear as in our second lesson:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing, for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subject

ed to futility not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it  
in hope; because the creation itself will be set free ~~to~~ from its bondage to  
decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

As is sometimes the case with Paul, he puts so many words together that it is hard to hear what he is saying. But in this passage he gives us a glimpse of a new heaven and a new earth, set free from bondage to decay, to death. Just as once the good creation of God was broken through ~~man~~ one man's sin, so one day through the righteousness of one man, Jesus Christ, all creation will be restored, good. ~~It is not enough for God to save our souls,~~ <sup>not only souls</sup> he wants to resurrect our bodies. ~~It is not enough for God to save the good,~~ <sup>not only souls</sup> he wants to justify the ungodly. ~~It is not enough for God to have brought~~ <sup>not only souls</sup> life to humans made in his image, his goal and promise is creation set free from its bondage to decay, creation redeemed, made new. God wants to make all things new, to save for himself all that he has created.

God's love is for Americans and Russians and Chinese and Nigerians. For people and dogs and cats and birds and mosquitos and flies. Rocks and trees and fish and oceans and stars and comets, all of these will participate in the kingdom God has planned.

Now I can't wrap my mind around all of that. I can imagine how God will save people, but mosquitos having anything to do with the kingdom seems ridiculous. But then the narrowness of my mind has been demonstrated so many times when I see how God must love my family and friends but my enemies and the poor and

Creation itself set free from its bondage to decay. The end of all dying and decaying and eroding and polluting, this is God's plan. Not only to save a chosen few, a remnant, through Jesus Christ God is about the business of redeeming all that he has created in love. For as creation was subjected to futility through the sin of one man, Adam, so through the righteousness of one Lord Jesus Christ God will one day set creation free.

How wide is God's love? So wide that it could include that golfer who had no regard for me and my safety? So wide that it could include people who have made fun of me, ridiculed me? So wide that it could include drug addicts and rock and roll singers and owners of vicious dogs?

My God and I. That is where most of us start in the Christian faith. God loves me.

And then my family. Eternal life is about being with them after death.

Then God stretches us to see that the whole church is precious to God. And here in the church we begin to learn about forgiving, reconciling.

But when we realize that God wants his whole church we have only begun to realize the width of God's love. For here in this gathering of the church we hear the witness to God's love and mercy for the poor, the hungry, the exploited. God concern for peoples of all races and nations.

Even God's desire to bring into his kingdom our enemies.

But only here in this one verse in Romans can we can we catch a glimpse of the love of a creator who wants to redeem all he has created.

Mosquitos. For some reason God created them, for what reason I can't even imagine. Yet they are part of the creation that will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. Mosquitos and dogs and cats and birds and rocks and trees and mountains and oceans and stars and comets. All will participate in the kingdom God has planned.

How we want to reduce God, to shrink him down, to fit the size of our concern. ~~But the love of God is as large as all that he has created, every thing and every one.~~ <sup>But God is always about the business of opening us up to that we may reflect the width & breadth & depth of his concern.</sup> His work is not a work of dividing and deciding and

sorting out the very best, His work is opening his arms to say yes, breaking the chains of decay and death ~~is~~ in Jesus Christ. ~~Sin has covered the ground with thorns and made it hard, Christ has opened the door to the land with no pesticides, no rotting~~

of

~~that is that Paul says that we consider his sufferings at this present time not as if we were making it with the glory that is to be revealed to us compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us in the future~~

In the meantime, God is a farmer, tossing out the seed, Jesus says. On the path and on the rocks and ~~among~~ among the thorns, everywhere God is scattering seed in the hope that not one spot of good soil will be missed. Not all the seed will grow, but God wants the very biggest harvest he can get. So he wants us to scatter the seed of his love in Jesus Christ so the harvest of faith in Jesus Christ will be as wide as God's love. Amen.