

“GOD’S LOVE”

Romans 5:6-15

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

June 18, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson for the Second Sunday after Pentecost comes from *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, chapter 5, verses 6 through 15. It is on page 798 of the pew Bible. In this lesson, the Apostle Paul teaches us what God’s love is. From Romans 5, we begin reading at verse 6.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Jesus Christ died for us. Think about that. Meditate on that. Isn’t that marvelous? Jesus Christ died for us. It’s not like some random, average person died for us. Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God, through whom all things in heaven and earth were created—that is the person who died for us. The perfect, righteous, eternal, and all-powerful Son of God—he is the one who took on human flesh, suffered intense anguish, and died for us. Now, if someone that awesome would sacrifice himself for us, what does that say about us? We must be pretty special, right? I mean, if Jesus is going to purchase us with his “holy and precious blood,” we must be really valuable. We must be intensely remarkable, right?

Or—and this is the other way to go—not.

If there is anything valuable or intensely remarkable in this whole thing, it is all in the love of God, which is manifested in the “innocent sufferings and death” of Jesus Christ.

It was not anything good in us that moved the Son of God to offer himself for us. If anything, the exact opposite is true. It was our weakness and sinfulness that moved the Son of God to purchase us with his blood.

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“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8)

So it’s not like God looked down and said, *Aw, they’re such cute little sinners. I just can’t help but die for them.* No; it’s more like God looked down and said, *What a mess! I need to do something about this.*

Now, if God were to operate by our logic, he would just destroy this whole mess, and that would be just. But that’s not what he did. God is love—not just some fleeting, selfish love, but an enduring, *selfless*, and *sacrificial* love. It is a love that is based on our need, and God’s goodness.

God does not love us because we are so *good*. God loves us because we are so *wicked*.

Now, if that sounds strange to us, perhaps we should reconsider our definition of the word *love*.

Love is not God’s feelings of affection for us. Contrary to our contemporary definition of the word *love*, the biblical word *love* does not describe God’s emotional feelings for us. Now, certainly, God does have emotional feelings for us. And this is expressed in the biblical word *compassion*. But the biblical word *love* describes God’s *action* toward us. The biblical word *love* describes God’s enduring, *selfless*, and *sacrificial actions* on our behalf. That is what the biblical word *love* means.

And this, by the way, is the same meaning the Bible uses when it calls us to love our neighbors. It’s even the same definition used to describe the love between husband and wife. We tend to think of marital love in terms of romance. But if you’ve ever been married for more than twelve minutes, you know there is sacrifice involved. So when the Scripture says, “Husbands, love your wives” (Eph. 5:25), it doesn’t mean, *just have warm fuzzies*. It means, *sacrifice yourself for her*, “[just] as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

The biblical word *love*—whether it describes the love God calls us to show to our neighbors, the love God desires to exist between husband and wife, or, especially, the love God showed us in his Son Jesus Christ—the biblical word *love* describes enduring, *selfless*, and *sacrificial* action.

So the love of God is not his deep emotion for us. That is God’s *compassion*. God’s love is his enduring, *selfless*, and *sacrificial* action on behalf of weak sinners. And this is most clearly seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When the Son of God hung beaten, bloodied, naked, and humiliated, it was not because you and I deserve it so much. It was because you and I need it so much. And this highlights the remarkable intensity of God’s love for us.

The point is not to use the cross of Christ to teach us how wicked we are. We learn that when we compare our thoughts, words, and deeds to the revelation of God’s will in the Ten Commandments. And once we learn the depth of our depravity according to the Law, we learn the depth of God’s love in the death of our Savior. For, “God shows his love for us in that while

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we were still *sinners*, Christ died for us.” God loved us by accepting our sin into his own body, suffering the intense guilt of sin on our behalf, and dying our death in our place. This is how God loved us, and this is how we are declared righteous.

And Paul goes on, “If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (5:10).

Now what does that mean? Does this mean Christ’s death wasn’t enough? By no means.

Our reconciliation to God was completely accomplished by Christ’s death, even before his resurrection. But if we have such hope in the dead Son of God, how much more hope do we have in our crucified and *risen* Savior. For, if he is risen from the dead, we know his sacrifice has been accepted. And, more than that, we know that Christ has defeated death and opened eternal life to us.

So we shall be saved from all enemies—not just sin and the devil, but even death. This is God’s gift to us. This is the deep, enduring, selfless, and sacrificial love of God for weak and ungodly sinners. For “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” So we are reconciled, justified, and saved, all by the loving action of God. Praise God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.