

GOD'S LOVE

Romans 5:6-15

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

June 18, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The epistle lesson for the Third Sunday after Pentecost comes from *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, chapter 5, verses 6 through 15. In this lesson, the Apostle Paul teaches us the depth of God's love. From Romans 5, beginning at verse 6, we read in Jesus' name.

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

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet 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.

¹⁵But 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's 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 remarkable. We must be intensely valuable, right?

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

We are intensely valuable to God. But if there is anything special 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 (*Luther's Small Catechism*, "Apostles' Creed").

We should not determine our goodness based on how much God loves us. We might do that with other humans, but that formula doesn't work in the sight of God. In the sight of God, goodness or righteousness is determined by the Law. Consider yourself in the light of the Ten Commandments. When we consider ourselves in this light, we see that there are many other

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things, things below God, that we have feared, loved, and trusted in instead of him. That violates the First Commandment. We see that we have often misused his name, and we have not called upon his name first in time of need. We have not prioritized worship and his Word. Thus, we have not received the rest he desires to give us. Or have we dishonored our parents? Have we hated or hurt our brothers and sisters? Have we lusted for someone who is not our spouse or been unfaithful to our spouse? Have we stolen or taken property that is not ours, even under the pretense of a legal right? Have we lied, slandered, or gossiped? Have we even desired someone or something that does not belong to us? These are the Ten Commandments. And if you really want to know if you are righteous or sinful, good or bad, consider yourself in the light of the Ten Commandments. Here we see that we are not righteous. We are not good. We are sinful and deserving of God's wrath.

And yet, you are remarkably valuable to God. This seems contradictory. But consider the concept of value. What determines the value of something? Value depends on what someone is willing to pay.

For example, about four years ago we bought a Subaru. Then, about one year ago, we needed to buy a minivan. So I thought about selling the Subaru. And I looked up what the supposed value of it was. It was significantly more than what I paid for it three years earlier. The car didn't get better. We added miles and food stains to the seats. I don't know if I would have gotten significantly more, but I certainly could have sold it for more than what I first paid for it. And you probably know why. There was a shortage of new cars, so someone would have been willing to pay extra for a decent used car. I kept it, by the way, and I sold a different car. But it illustrates the concept of value. Something is as valuable as what someone is willing to pay for it. And that also means that if I can't find someone to pay top dollar for a used Subaru, then it's not worth top dollar. Also, the value of a house depends on what someone is willing to pay for it. And the value of land depends on what someone is willing to pay for it.

Now let's apply this to something totally different. How do you know how valuable you are to God? What did God pay for you? Jesus Christ purchased you "not with silver and gold, but with His holy and precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death" (Luther's *Small Catechism*, "The Apostles' Creed"). That doesn't mean you're good. But it does indicate your value to God. You are worth, at the very least, his blood and death. And this is not because you are good. We already know that we are not righteous. You have this immense value because God is good. He's willing to pay this extreme cost in spite of unrighteousness. So it's not our righteousness that makes us valuable. It's the intense love of God that makes us valuable.

Think about this with me. In our world, who dies for another person? A pretty good person might die for another pretty good person. When you drop down to an average person, it becomes more questionable. An average person might die for someone else if that person is really good, like more than just pretty good, or if it's someone they really care about, like their wife or child. But an average person? Probably not. What about a bad person? Probably not anyone. Bad people don't die for other bad people. And most pretty good people won't die for a bad person. There's an inverse relationship between the relative goodness of a person and the relative goodness of someone they might be willing to die for. As the character of the "die-er" goes up, the bar for the persons they would be willing to die for goes down. So an average person might have a few people they would consider dying for. A pretty good person would have more people in that pool. And a person of very high moral character would have a bigger pool.

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So think about who you would be willing to die for. And try to think about in honesty, I won't make you tell anybody, and we can't read your thoughts. So don't just try to qualify yourself as one of those really good persons. Who would you really die for? Honestly; who, if anyone, would you sacrifice your life to save? Who do you value more than yourself?

And now ask yourself the flipside, "Who would I not die for? Who's someone I know who's just been a real jerk to me?" Or who can you think of from the news or world history, who's definitely not worth dying for?

If we are at all honest with ourselves, the list of people we would die for is pretty short. And the list of people we would not die for is the other eight billion people in the world. If we were better than we really are, if we were less selfish, and more loving, the list would be longer, but it's not.

Who's on Jesus' list? All those eight billion people we left off ours, and even more from the past and the future. Everyone is on that list. Even the people you specifically thought of that you would not die for, they are on his list. And you are on that list. This really says nothing about how good you and I are. But it says everything about Jesus. And this is the core of Christianity.

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.

"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." We keep breaking his commandments. We don't work the way he created us to. But instead of that deterring him from sacrificing himself for us, that actually moves him to sacrifice himself for us. That's how good he is.

If God were to operate by our logic, he would just destroy this whole mess, and that would be just.

If you're into making things, whether it's quilting, woodworking, baking, or some other craft. There's a certain point where you don't bother trying to fix something that got messed up. If you cut a board too short, it's not worth trying to stretch it. Or if you forgot to put sugar in your cookies, it's not worth injecting the sugar, one grain at a time into them after they're baked. It's not worth it. It's far better to just do it over again.

But with God, he doesn't care what it costs, and he's not even the one who messed it up. If he operated by our logic, he would just destroy the world and start over. 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, in spite of our wickedness, because he is so good.

We have moments throughout our lives when we feel unlovable. We feel condemned. And that's different than godly conviction. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin so that we will flee to Jesus for forgiveness. But I'm talking about when we feel condemned. That's when we feel like God can't love us anymore. That's despair, and it comes from the devil, not from God. When you have those moments, ask yourself this question, "How good is God? Is he good enough to still love me?" Because if God can't love you anymore, that means there is a limit to his

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goodness. Is God's goodness limited? Is that really what we think? That's what you confess if you think he can't love you. That is a false confession. God loves us, not because he is good, but because he is good.

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 common usage 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 a day, 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 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.

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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.