

“God’s Love Is Revealed in the Crucified Christ”

Romans 5.1-11 & St. Mark 8.27-38

2nd Sunday in Lent 2006

The Word of God which will serve as the basis of our sermon meditation this 2nd Sunday in Lent was recorded for our faith and life in our Epistle Reading from the Book of Romans and from the Gospel of St. Mark, both of which were read earlier.

One of the many things I have learned as I have worked with men and women wanting to be married and with marriages where there have been some struggles is that when one speaks about loving the other, men and women are many times thinking entirely different things. Those who are married know from experience just how these differences present challenges and even some laughs in your marriage, but most of all it provides opportunities for a husband and wife to grow in their love and have their devotion and affection for each one deepened and intensified. Understanding how love is revealed in marriage is a lifelong education.

In our Scripture readings for today we hear of how God’s love for us is revealed in the crucified Christ. Paul uses some very straight-forward language to inform us of the content of God’s love saying “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.” As Lutherans we are accustomed to speaking and talking about God’s love in connection with Christ and with His crucifixion. For us there is no other way as we remain faithful to the Scriptures and all they teach.

Yet, in our world today God’s love is often spoken of apart from Christ crucified and raised for our salvation. Many present and teach God’s love as simply an abstract feeling from God, not a concrete and real sacrifice of God’s Son for our salvation. Recently, as I have heard some television preachers and have read bits and pieces of their material, I have observed this trend. They will talk about God. They will say God loves them. They will say Jesus loves them. But that is where it ends. There is no mention of the cross, no mention of Jesus crucified and sacrifice for our salvation, no mention of God’s love rescuing the sinner from death and damnation. Just a generic, warm, fuzzy, sentimental notion of love is presented to the listener.

In many ways this is appealing, is it not? If God’s love is simply presented in an ambiguous and abstract manner with no

connection to the cross, a crucified Jesus, and deliverance from sin, then you can pretty much walk away from such a message with no feeling of guilt and need for rescue for punishment. After all, God's love is presented, not as Him rescuing you from wrath and damnation, but as God just wrapping you in His arms and making you feel all warm and cozy. Such teaching of God's love is attractive to modern America and, let's be honest, it is attractive to the sinful self in all of us because it does not involve cost or sacrifice of any kind. All it involves is God being nice to us, even though we stumble about or, God forbid, live a life of sin with no repentance and remorse whatsoever.

But, is this how God demonstrates His love toward us? Is His love disconnected from the cross of Christ? Is His love devoid of sacrifice, cost, and giving of the Only-begotten from all eternity? Is His love just some warm and cozy sort of feeling He exudes to assure us everything is all right? Or is it something more, something concrete, something historical, and someone real?

Our Scripture readings for today make it quite plain God's love is revealed in the Christ who is crucified, who is fastened to a cross, who suffers and dies a gruesome and ignominious death to rescue the sinner from death and damnation. St. Paul states unequivocally "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel reading from St. Mark reveals that He, the Beloved of the Father, is going to suffer many things, be rejected by the chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

To divorce God's love from the cross, to separate God's love from the Christ crucified and raised for our salvation, puts us, and any one else, in league with Peter, with Satan. It reveals that we have in mind the things of men and not the things of God. In other words, we have in mind what we or at least what the world says love is, but we do not have in mind what God says His love is for us in Jesus.

Notice how quickly Jesus acts to dispel this deception and falsehood in Peter and the rest of the disciples. Jesus wastes no time rebuking Peter and saying "Get behind Me, Satan!" Jesus knows that if you want Him without the cross, you get nothing. In fact, it can only lead to the loss of one's soul and Christ's denial of

you at Judgment Day. For one to believe that we are reconciled, brought back to God, and justified apart from Christ crucified is to believe a lie and be deceived by Satan himself. To teach such is to teach a Christ and a God that the Scriptures do not know.

Now, you may be wondering, so how does this apply to us? It is not like we are the television preachers or authors, so what does this have to do with us, Pastor? Well, consider for a moment, if you will, how do you view God's love for you? Have you looked at it like Peter wanted to look at it, as not involving the sacrifice of Jesus for a sinner like you? Have you tried to minimize your own sinfulness and in the process altered God's love in Jesus as defined by the Spirit in His Word?

And, even if you have maintained the right understanding and picture of God's love for you in Jesus crucified and raised for your salvation, have you then loved others as God has loved you? Husbands, have you loved your wives with the love with which Christ loved the Church? Wives, sons, daughters, have you loved your fellow man, your neighbor and kept all the commandments of God, taken up your cross and followed Him?

For you see, just as God's love is revealed to us in the concrete, historical, and real Jesus, crucified and raised for our salvation, so also is our love revealed in what we do, say, and think. Jesus rebukes Peter because he does not have that love as he seeks to prevent Jesus from going the way of the cross. Nor do we when we do not live and love others sacrificially, giving, and serving them willingly, gladly, and joyfully.

For such we should reap death and damnation but how wonderful that we hear God has revealed His love to us in the crucified Christ "in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God's love for the sinner, for you and me, has been demonstrated to us in the Christ who was crucified for our salvation, who was killed for the saving of our souls, who was sacrificed for our rescue from Hell's punishments to the glories of Heaven.

God's love, the Scriptures teach, is defined by the crucified Christ who gives up His life to save us from our sin. Not only does our Epistle reading from Romans teach this, our Lord Himself teaches it in the Gospel reading from St. Mark and, in fact, states it point

blank in St. John's Gospel when He says "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

St. John also notes in his First Epistle that God's love is connection to the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. He states "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

Recently in the First Year Confirmation Class the students had to answer this question in their workbook lesson. "What is your understanding of "God is love"? One of the young ladies in the class gave one of the best answers to that question that I have ever heard. She wrote "God is ultimate love because He loves the world so much He gave His one and only Son to die on the cross for us." I'm not sure that I could say it any better.

It is only in the crucified Christ, sent into the world by the Father, who is sacrificed for our redemption, that we learn what God's love truly is. God's love leads Him to give up His only Son unto death on the accursed tree to save us from the curse of sin. The Father's love moves Him to send the Eternal Son into the world born of Mary in order to rescue every sinner from death and damnation in Hell.

The love of God is sacrificial, it is giving, it involves a price, a cost, a death for those He made, for those who have sinned and rebelled against Him. His love comes and rescues us even when we did not know we needed the rescue. His love regarded us in our greatest hour of need even when we did not realize it. His love did all that was necessary for us to live with Him forever.

Through faith in Christ, we have been saved for eternal life. Through faith in the crucified Son of God Incarnate our reconciliation and forgiveness has been secured in His blood. Through faith in Jesus we have every confidence as the Day of Judgment arrives that we will enter everlasting life and the glory of

the Father forever and ever. God's love has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus, who was crucified for us while we were still sinners and who was raised the third day justifying us in His blood so that we may be His now and forever. God grant that we hold to this blessed, soul-saving truth and share it with everyone we meet. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+