October 11/12, 2025
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (1st of 3 Sundays celebrating 175 Years of WELS)
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Romans 5:8-10
Christ *For Us*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A 54-year-old man from Iowa named Jim Koch displayed a romantic gesture to his wife, Lora. 1 week after Lora underwent surgery related to breast cancer, Jim re-proposed to his wife. They had been married for 26 years already, but in his words, Jim "**wanted to give a sign and a reminder of his love and commitment."**

A 17-year-old volunteer firefighter named Joseph Chambers saved a police officer's life by pulling the police officer through the window of his patrol car that had burst into flames after a serious car accident. Joseph would go on to risk his life again and again by becoming a police officer himself.

A town in Istanbul showed unique kindness to a man named Muaharrem. Muaharrem was deaf and often felt left out in his hometown. That all changed, however, when the entire neighborhood where Muaharrem lived learned sign language and surprised him one day by communicating via sign language as he walked down the sidewalk.

If I were to ask you, "how did those stories make you feel?" you'd probably answer, "They made me smile." "They encouraged me to be kind." "It's nice to hear such stories amidst all the bad news reports."

Now, I don't want to put a damper on the positive tone of those stories, nor am I intending to minimize what those people lovingly did to help others. But, I want to ask a different question. As you think about Jim re-proposing to his wife, about Joseph saving the police officer's life, and about Muaharrem's neighborhood learning sign language, ask yourself this: what did they do *for you?*

Certainly, they all serve as good examples. They might help change you to be more kind and loving and selfless yourself. After hearing such stories, it's now up to you. They are just examples. Ultimately, they don't change your lot in life.

I got another heartwarming story for you, albeit sad. A man destined for greatness gave up his greatness for others who didn't deserve to be great. He showed kindness to so many. But, so often, what he got in return was mockery, evil looks, and false testimony as to who he was. He stood up for the downtrodden. He spoke up for those who didn't have a say. And, then, he eventually practiced what he preached: turn the other cheek. He gave up his life without rebellion.

As you think about Jesus of Nazareth living an exemplary, perfect life and then giving up his life on the cross, how does that make you feel? Sad? Motivated to do what Jesus would do? Encouraged to be selfless and peaceful? Better yet, how does his story answer the question: what did Christ do *for you?*

While the first three heartwarming stories put the ball in your court to change, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, has actually changed you with what he did. While the first three stories ultimately only did something for the ones they showed kindness to, Christ did everything for you and the whole world. That's what we get to focus on today: Christ *for us.*

I want to start with that phrase *for us* because that phrase tells us a lot about God's love. Recall again those first three stories. Jim offered a romantic gesture to his wife. Joseph showed courage for a selfless public servant. A community showed kindness to a man you'd say deserved it. Those are all actions you'd expect based on who the recipient is. But, when it comes to God's love to humans, that's unexpected.

Shown to us humans whom Paul describes in this chapter as "ungodly" (v6), "sinners" (v8), and "God's enemies" (v10). Yup…that's you. That's me. Ungodly. Sinner. An enemy of God. That's a sobering truth. In a

world that operates on two-sided love, we have done nothing to motivate God to love us. Quite the opposite. We've done everything to motivate his wrath on our very existence.

Our first lesson gives us a perfect example of what sinful humans, ourselves included, are so primed to do: make excuses in an attempt to make ourselves not look so bad. Adam not only blamed Eve, he blamed God for his sin. Eve blamed the serpent. Neither took accountability for their sinful actions. Both tried to excuse their sin. They tried to talk their way back into a relationship with God.

That's you. That's me. Ungodly. Sinner. An enemy of God. Passing the blame. We blame others for not loving us enough, for stressing us out and driving us toward sinful tendencies to let off some steam. And, too easily, we turn God into a scapegoat. If only he'd give me a better lot in life, I wouldn't have to complain. I'd actually be content if he'd give me the daily bread I think I need. And, yes, the devil is the one who tempts. But, to blame him for your sin and mine is to turn a blind eye to who we are by nature: undeserving of God's love.

Yes, "for us" needs to be first and foremost a sobering reality. Because, without the understanding of our sins and what we deserve, Christ disappears. God's love isn't needed. What are we even doing here, then? The phrase "for us sinful humans" needs to constantly be part of the Church's message. That message doesn't just teach us about who we are. It teaches about the marvelous nature of God's love.

Paul writes, **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** The death you and I deserved because of everything we've said to this point…that's the death Christ died *for us.* God's love is beyond any love shown by mankind. Mankind would not love in this way. Such love exists in and of itself, not motivated by external means. God is love itself. God loved you so much, despite what you've done and not even in regard to any good you'd do, he promised a Savior (our first lesson) and followed through on sending a Savior (our gospel). That love was ultimately displayed for all to see on the cross. And, its benefits extend to you and to your children and to their children and so on.

Remember how we said that those heartwarming stories from our introduction are nice, but what do they really do for you? They might motivate you to change, but they don't actually change you. This true historical story of Jesus changes you because of everything Christ did. He is the subject of your salvation. You are simply the passive recipient. **"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him."**

What Paul means is that the only mouth which can persuade God the Father to declare you not guilty is the mouth of your Savior who speaks up on your behalf when he says, "This child of yours is forgiven through my perfect life, my innocent shedding of blood on the cross, and through my rising from the dead." This is your status now. Because it's all about Christ *for us.* You are declared not guilty of your sins.

For us, then, is now a recognition that we are no longer God's enemies, but his friends, his children, his chosen people. Because you are declared guilty right now, you know that God's wrath will pass over you on the last day. Instead, he will welcome you into your heavenly mansion which Jesus is preparing for you. Christ is doing that for you.

What else has Christ done for us because he demonstrates his love for us every day? He took ownership of reconciling you to himself. Listen again to such gospel language. **"For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?"** Like worldly love, reconciliation usually takes two active parties. Two countries at war both need to agree to terms of peace. The brother who wronged his sibling needs to be the one to approach the sibling first, and hopefully, the one wronged will agree to reconciliation.

Do you want to know how loving God is and what he does for us? He initiated and completed reconciliation. He did nothing wrong to you and me. We declared ourselves enemies of God simply because we inherited a sinful nature. That's all on us. We should be the ones approaching God seeking reconciliation. We should be the ones telling God what we'll do to earn reconciliation.

But, that's not how it works. And, God be praised for that! Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. Did Adam and Eve seek reconciliation? When God asked Adam and Eve what they had done, he knew. He was giving them a chance to seek his favor. Instead, they foolishly stood their sinful ground, making themselves out to be enemies. So, what we'd expect God to do, he didn't. He didn't pour out his wrath on his enemies. He made them his own again by reconciling them to himself with the promise of the Savior.

He has done that for us. That is, again, why he sent his Son to die. For us. He took complete ownership of bringing you back to him. He sought you out. He brought you to faith. He does it all for us. There is no greater message out there. What a message to believe. What a message to proclaim. You are reconciled to God, at peace with him already now. So, when you meet him in death and stand before him again on the Last Day, you'll see him as your dear Father.

All this for us. Christ entered our world to do it all for us. For us sinful humans who don't deserve his love and cannot contribute an ounce toward salvation. For us, the crown of God's creation so that we know we'll be in God's image, holy and righteous, forevermore again one day. Christ *for us.* May this continue to be the message of our synod for many years to come as it has for 175 years up to this point. Christ *for us* so that we might continue to be the message of Christ for others. Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.