

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 2, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church
Pastor Charles Heup

Romans 5:6 - 11 (NIV)

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** 9) **Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!** 10) 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! 11) **Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

Dearly beloved,

How do you say, "I love you?" Often saying, I love you involves more than words. Some of the best ways of saying I love involve doing something for someone in need. That's how God said, I love you. He did something for us to show his love for us. Our text reminds us to

Theme: Rejoice in the Lord's Love

1. A love which makes great sacrifices
2. A love which assures us of our salvation
3. A love which compels us to speak

Paul calls attention to a universal need when he describes us as being powerless and ungodly. Of course, those words don't sound too complementary, do they? Powerless – that's a pretty strong word. We're often encouraged to accentuate our strengths. People like to boost about their mental, physical, athletic, or financial abilities or strengths. By nature, everyone would like to think that we have the ability to convince God to serve us. But as God sees us, we have no strength at all, no strength to seek him, no strength to serve him, no strength to save ourselves, no strength to draw his attention to us.

It's hard even for Christians to admit this because our sinful flesh always wants to take some credit. We're constantly being bombarded with messages from those who encourage us to be all that we can be, to put our best foot forward, to do our best. We all like to think that we can pick ourselves up by our bootstraps when we're down – but in spite of what we think and what others might tell us – God's word still stands: We're powerless but Paul tells us that this is ultimately a cause for rejoicing because when we were powerless God showed his love to us.

And amazingly he did this at just the right time – when we needed it the most because we were powerless and because we were ungodly. Now most people I know like to consider themselves as being godly. What they mean by that is that they don't consider themselves to be pagans – they believe in a god of some sort or other. And of course they do their best to be good people. You see that's the same way that people at the time of Paul felt. The Greeks and Romans had all kinds of gods that they talked about and honored. The Jews considered themselves to be the chosen people of God whether they worshipped him or not. Among all this piety though there was a lack of true reverence for the true God – a lack of reverence which showed itself in the fact that they ignored God's word and what he said about himself. They trusted in their own righteousness. In fact, some had even gone so far as to conclude that they deserved to have Christ die for them. I'm guessing there are those who feel that way today too. But our text challenges that false notion with God's truth which declares that Christ died for the ungodly. If we are going to claim that Christ died for us – then we have to also admit that we were powerless – unable to do anything to assist with our salvation and ungodly – unworthy of having God do something for us.

Paul describes the love of God for us by calling attention to the great sacrifice that Christ made for us: **You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

It's a pretty rare situation when someone is willing to give up his life for someone else. A parent might be willing to risk a life threatening operation to help out their child. If an important world leader's life were at stake, someone might be willing to risk their life to save theirs. Of course, firefighters, police personnel and the military who are charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives of others may at times give up their lives in the line of duty – but for the most part that's a rare situation – one which we hope will they will never have to face.

Would anyone be willing to lay down their life for the “black” sheep of the family, the scum of society, or an enemy? That's another matter and an even more rare happening. Most would consider that to be too great a sacrifice. **8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Once again, Paul has chosen some rather unflattering language to remind us what God has done for us. He calls us sinners – people who have missed the mark. Once again, I'm guessing most people would take exception to this. We like to think of ourselves as being on target, or only a little bit off course in the way we relate to God and each other. But as far as God is concerned we don't even come close we fall far short of the target.

Our culture doesn't talk much about sin. It's not politically correct to label someone as a sinner. But if the term is used – it's usually applied to someone who is guilty of some gross or violent evil behavior. That's not how God uses the term. Christ didn't just die for those who were guilty of gross and violent behavior – he died for every single human being. He died for sinners – that's what God calls each of us because of the evil in our hearts – evil that from time to time oozes into our words and actions.

Christ Jesus sacrificed his life for sinners – people like us. God gave up his Son for us. He made a sacrifice we would never think of making. He did it because he loved us. His love is there for all to see, believe, and rejoice in. His love is revealed in Christ – who lived the only perfect life of love which can stand up under God's scrutiny. God's love provided the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. That love assures us of our salvation.

9) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

God didn't exercise his wrath toward us when we were powerless, ungodly sinners – he willingly sacrificed his Son. Now that we have been justified and declared innocent by the blood of Christ – there's certainly no way that he'll take out his wrath on us. Our salvation is sure.

But we might have a hard time with that thought. What's our reaction when someone who was very angry with us suddenly says that they're not angry anymore? Do we immediately trust them? What if the hostility was deep and long standing? Would we believe his words? Even if we wanted to – there still might be some nagging doubts.

As people who know that we deserve God's punishment and who live in a world full of heartaches and disappointments it's natural that there may be those times when we wonder if God hasn't decided to punish us

after all. Paul reminds us that he didn't do that when we were without Christ. And there's no way that he will do that now that Christ has offered his life for us and taken it back up again! We can be confident of our salvation now and on the last day!

10) For if, when 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!

Once again, Paul points out how underserving we are of his blessings by reminding us that we were God's enemies. The point that Paul is making isn't that God treated us as his enemy but that we treated him as our enemy – think back to the Garden of Eden immediately after the fall into sin. Adam and Eve failed to listen to God and chose to listen to the Devil. When God came to speak with them – they ran away from the one they perceived to be the enemy! Yet he came with a promise of grace and salvation. After God found Adam – Adam continued to treat him as the enemy – blaming God for creating the woman who shared the forbidden fruit with him. Adam treated God as the enemy! But Adam and Eve were the ones who had gone against God – they deserved his wrath and anger.

And isn't that exactly how our sinful consciences react at times. God makes us aware of our sins by his law and our conscience tries to make excuses. Sinful man blames God for the trouble, the evil, the tragedies in this world. Sinful man continues to treat God as the enemy in spite of the fact that God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ Jesus.

Paul reminds us to rejoice in the love of God because we have been reconciled. By God's grace to us in Christ – the hostility that existed between God and us has been removed. By taking our sins away, Christ has removed any reason for us to treat God as the enemy. By taking our sins away, Christ has also remove the source of the Lord's righteous wrath. When God should have destroyed us because we were his enemies, he didn't. Instead, he removed the reason for his hostility toward us by taking our sin and placing it on his Son, letting him suffer the penalty of hell and death in our place so that we now are regarded as his friends – more than friends as his children by adoption. We know that but at times, we're filled with doubts – but Paul assures us that there's no reason for doubt by pointing us to the living Christ.

If Christ's work had ended with his death – we'd have every reason to wonder whether or not our salvation was sure and certain. If Christ were still dead, we'd have to wonder if maybe the Father would be just a little bit upset with us yet since our sins had cost him so dearly. But Christ's resurrection answers this question and more for us.

Have all sins been atoned for? Yes they have since Christ lives. There could be no resurrection if any sin had remained. Can God still withhold his blessings from us? How could he? His Son lives and rules in heaven and intercedes for us. When the last day comes, we will be saved by faith in his living Son. There's no doubt about it. Since Christ lives there is no reason for condemnation – but there's plenty of reason to rejoice in the love of God – a love that made great sacrifices for us, a love which assures us of our salvation and a love which compels us to speak as Paul reminds us.

Paul's next words remind me of a fun little song – if you're happy and you know it clap your hands if you're happy and you know then your face will really show it if you're happy and you know it clap your hands. Stamp your feet, shout hooray and do all three.

When we're happy it's normal for us to want to share our happiness with others by letting them see our joy! Well that's what Paul encourages us to do in the final verse of our text.

11) Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

We can boast about what God has done for us through our Lord, Jesus Christ. This boasting comes as a result of the confidence that we have in Christ Jesus. We rejoice or boast about salvation to others not to call attention ourselves but to call attention to what Christ has done for us. God gets our full glory and praise. Our joy and our confidence compel us to rejoice in the Love of God. God's love for us and for all compels us to speak.

You've probably all heard a proud mom or dad boasting about the wonderful things their child has done. You've probably also heard a child boasting about their parents. As God's children we have every reason to speak about him to others to let them know of his love for them. We just won't be able to help it – such rejoicing is a result of being sure of that love. Such rejoicing is the result of the great sacrifice that God made for us. Amen.