

Theme: Christ for us.

Text: Romans 5:8-10

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!

God's Word for our meditation today is our second reading from Romans chapter 5. Let's begin with prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not. Amen.*

In 1850 Pastor Johannes Muelhaeuser presided over the first convention of *Das Deutsche Evangelische Ministerium von Wisconsin*, what would later come to be known as the *Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*. Muelhaeuser had only been in Wisconsin for a little over a year at that point after serving as a missionary in New York. He had been sent to America by a German mission society who wanted to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Muelhaeuser had been a baker in Germany before studying to become a missionary. He had hoped to go to Asia or Africa, but the mission society felt he was too old at the age of 32 to be a missionary and learn the languages needed to reach people in Asia and Africa. And so he was sent to New York City. But there he found English too difficult and was quickly sent to Rochester, New York where he would spend the next 10 years serving as a pastor. In 1848 he learned of a great need for Lutheran pastors in Wisconsin and resigned his pastorate to move to Milwaukee where he would quickly start a congregation, and only a year or so later, a new church body.

What is it that prompts Christians to do such things? Why would a church in Germany care about sending pastors and missionaries around the world? Why would a man like Johannes Muelhaeuser go from selling baked goods in his homeland to selling Bibles on the streets of Milwaukee as he gathered a congregation in a new land? Well, the answer of course is Christ.

And over the closing weeks of October we will pause to consider our Synod's 175th anniversary with themes like "Christ through us" next week, and "Christ with us" the following week... But we start today with the foundational teaching about Christ. The reason men and women have dared to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth in years past. The reason we do the same still today... Well we do such things because of "Christ for us."

Why was the WELS founded? Because at the end of the day there were people who believed that the Word of God in its truth and purity matters... people who believed that clearly communicating Christ matters... and people who had learned from God's Word that the only thing that matters for each of us in the end is "Christ for us." This foundational truth is where we must start when we think about the blessings not only of our church body, but the blessings our church body has proclaimed these past 175 years. It all starts and ends with "Christ for us." "Christ for us" matters at the end of your day today more than anything else. And it matters at the end of your days. And we'll consider this great truth as we look at the Word of God found in Romans chapter 5.

When St. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans he was doing mission work himself. He was taking the message of Christ into the world, establishing churches, raising up leaders, training new pastors, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he was also busy writing nearly half the books we find in the New Testament.

This book though is different from most of his New Testament letters. When he wrote to churches and individuals he was usually writing to people who knew him... people who had known him as a missionary and pastor already.

But in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul was writing to a small group of believers that he had not yet met. But he was eager to make their acquaintance. Listen to how he began this letter back in chapter 1: **I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. Romans 1:8-10**

Paul goes on to write what is perhaps the most magnificent doctrinal explanation for God's plan of salvation that you will find in the Bible. He traces the problem of sin to its source, reminding the Romans that sin has been a problem since Adam and Eve – as we heard in our first reading today. Paul reminds them also that no one is immune from the infection of sin. **All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...** he writes, and... **the wages of sin is death.**

And yet Paul does not leave the Romans with no hope. He points them to the same hope men like Adam and Abraham had. The Savior God promised to those men, came and made good on God's promises. And so we have good news, a gospel that changes everything for us. **All are justified freely by his grace...** Paul writes, and... **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Because of this Paul could assure them in this letter: **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...** and **nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.** These unconditional truths are all based on one simple yet profound teaching that was the beating heart, not just of this letter to the Romans, but of all of Paul's writings: "Christ for us."

And in our sermon verses from chapter 5 of his letter we see this laid out so beautifully. Listen again to the good news that sinners like us need: **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 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!**

There are many times in this life that people think being a Christian is all about doing things to please God, or doing things to help others. And there are many times we are tempted to think that way too. At the end of the day we are tempted to view our status with God based on how good of day we had. Did we fall into great and shameful sin? Or did we have a pretty good day and avoid the really bad stuff? Did we help our neighbor or harm our neighbor? Yes it is easy at the end of each day to think we are nearer to God or farther away from him based on what we've done for him.

This is not Christianity. This is not what Paul preached. It is not what the WELS was founded to proclaim. And may it never be what is preached from this pulpit! No we preach "Christ for us." At the end of the day, no matter how good or bad your behavior... not matter how nice or nasty you were to your neighbor... no matter if you think you deserve a pat on the back or are afraid God is ready to knock you into the dirt for your wicked thoughts, words, and deeds... at the end of the day the only thing that matters is "Christ for us."

Did Paul say that God showed us mercy because we deserved it? Because we are good? NO! **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** The word love here is the Greek word *agape* which is a love that shows kindness to those who do not deserve it. God did not love us because he felt bad for us, or because he had to as our Creator, he did it in spite of what we are. Sinful, wicked, rebellious creatures. God did not wait for us to clean up our act before extending his

grace, no **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Jesus lived a holy life because we could not. Jesus died on the cross because as true God and true man in one person he could make a sacrifice that would count for all of us. Jesus and his work is what matters most in our lives. Christ for us. Not us for Christ. Not us for God. Not us for others. **CHRIST FOR US.** That is how we are saved. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross is how we know God loves us. It is how we know we stand forgiven. It is how we know where we stand with God, and not just now, but forever. Listen again to what Paul goes on with: **Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!**

Paul uses the language of a courtroom to describe the saving work of God. We have been justified by the blood of Jesus that was shed for us. Christ for us. To be justified means to be "declared not guilty" in God's courtroom. This does not mean we are innocent. Far from it. We are sinful by nature and have sinned against God in thoughts, words, and actions. God our judge should say of us: "I find the defendant guilty as charged and sentence him to the eternal punishment he deserves." But that verdict did not fall on us. It fell on Christ. Christ died for us. Christ became sin for us. Christ took the guilty verdict for us. And in place of that verdict we are gifted the verdict that should have belonged to him alone: "Not guilty." This is what Christ has done for us.

And since that is true, we don't have to fear God's wrath. Not at the end of the day, no matter how terrible you behaved, no matter how much you mistreated your spouse, or talked back to your parents, or ignored your responsibilities, or lied, or lusted, or found your lips filled with gossip or your heart filled with greed. No, at the end of the day "Christ for us" means we can lay our heads down to sleep knowing we stand forgiven. God's wrath fell on Jesus, so it will never fall on me. I am redeemed. I am loved. And not because of anything in me, but because of all that Christ has done for me. At the end of the day "Christ for us" is all that matters.

And at the end of our days "Christ for us" is all that matters. Paul's final words of our sermon text remind us of this comforting truth. **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!** Paul's point is that is God reconciled us to himself through Jesus' death on the cross for us... now that we are in this perfect relationship with him... redeemed, reconciled, restored... how much more will God make sure that through Christ's resurrected life for us, we will be saved eternally.

When the car blindsides you and your soul and body are separated in an instant... when cancer crushes you... when dementia destroys you... when tragedy strikes... whenever the end of your days come... and however the end of your days come... because of Christ for us we need not fear. Your eternal safety in heaven. Your certain bodily resurrection and everlasting life. Your home with saints and angels. Your place before the throne of God. **ALL OF THIS** is certain because Christ rose from death for you. And so while you may not look forward to the pain or uncertainty of dying, you don't have to fear death. The end is not the end, because Jesus rose for you. The end of your days here on earth will usher in the beginning of the life that is truly life... the life filled with no more temptation or sin or suffering or sadness or mourning or crying or pain. Those are the things of this life of sin and death. But Jesus died and rose for us. And so we have the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven. At the end of the day... at the end of our days. Christ for us is all that matters.

Christ for us. This is why the WELS was formed. Christ for us is the only message that will call sinners to faith and new life in God. Christ for us is the only message that will comfort and calm us at the end of the day. And Christ for us is why we need not worry about the end of our days. Christ has died... Christ has risen... Christ has saved us... Christ has done it all for us. Amen.

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways. Amen. 1 Kings 8:57-58