

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI www.goodshepherdwi.org

“Love to the Loveless Shown That They Might Lovely Be”

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“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” (Romans 5:6-8).

For whom would you be willing to lay down your life? Most of us as parents would gladly do that for our children. We wouldn't even have to think about it. It would probably work that way with your spouse too. Many would lay down our lives for our friends, though with a couple of my friends, I'd have to mull it over. Military personnel, police and fire fighters become our heroes because they are willing to put their lives on the line for perfect strangers.

But what about your enemies? Would you lay down your life for your enemy: the one who has no respect for you and speaks ill of you every chance he gets? Or what about the one who by choice is unproductive, given to crime and lives off of society's forbearance? Or the one who makes himself rich through frivolous lawsuits. Would you lay your life down for that one? What about the narcissist, who thinks his life *is* worth more than yours and that you really **should** lay down your life for him? It's the only decent thing to do, after all. Would you do it? Paul writes, “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.” Though enemies of God, He laid down His life for you and me.

You might not see yourself as ever having been God's enemy, but Romans 8 says, “The sinful mind is hostile to God.” Not neutral, not an ally . . . enemies of God. Yet Jesus died also for His enemies.

This is the unique love of God. Clearly, it has nothing to do with us, with our qualities. His love for us is integral to **His** nature. He loves us not because we are so loveable, but because it's who He is. 1 John 4:8, “God is love”.

Let's dig a little deeper. We know no one can love unless they have been loved. It usually starts with parents, siblings, grandparents, and continues with friends and spouse. But what of the child that grows up unloved. It happens actually. That child will need someone to love him or her . . . a neighbor, a teacher, another family that steps in temporarily to give it care and love so that child can, in turn, grow up to have loving relationships. By the way, this is what Safe Families is about. As a congregation, we are adding Safe Families as a ministry of our church. Safe Families works to keep families together in our church and school and community. It keeps kids from becoming a ward of the state and will ensure at risk children in our community never grow up unloved. More on this later!

The point is the only way we can love others is if we have been loved. The only way your parents could have loved you is if they had been loved by their parents.

Eventually, you must get back to the prime lover, *the unloved lover*, the one who spontaneously generates love from its own being. That One is God. Jesus reveals the Triune God as the only and original spontaneous source of self-giving love for the unlovable. 1 John 4, “We love because he first loved us” (v. 19).

In love, Jesus laid down His life not just for his friends, but also for the narcissists, for the lazy, for the slum lords and pimps, those who don’t care one little whit about Him or His people, even those who hate Him. Jesus loved and died for them too.

Is there another way He could have shown His love for us? How about if God were to give us great wealth and riches; would that show His love for us? I don’t think so. That wealth might do us more harm than good. Besides, it doesn’t cost Him anything. It’s no skin off His back. Having an unlimited supply, gold means nothing to Him. He can make more if he wants.

How about if He were to give you great intelligence, or great health. Again, these gifts would not diminish His resources one little bit. They would not cost him. He’s God. There’s always more from where that came.

But the Father has only one Son. That’s the one thing that would cost God dearly. Giving us His only Son certainly shows His love for us in ways that nothing else can. “God so loved the world, that He gave His *only begotten* Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

We are saved by His sacrifice or we are not saved at all. Sometimes we get confused about that. We start looking around at others, measuring ourselves up against others and we may look pretty good by comparison. Or maybe not so much! Maybe we know we don’t measure up. In either case, God’s standard is not how we are doing compared to others. His standard is perfection, His own perfection. Jesus said, “You must be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). So it’s really not relevant or helpful to compare yourself with others, because you will not be judged against others. You will be judged as an individual against the perfection of God Himself. Since we are all well short of perfection, that means we are unjust and unrighteous until we are *made* just and righteous.

Hear again, the Good News of this text: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God” (v. 9). Jesus delivers us from the wrath of God by stepping in our place. He takes in the Father’s righteous wrath so that we can be spared from it. Judgment passes over us and onto Him. Therefore, Jesus is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Again, from our text, “Since we have been justified, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Through Him, we have been reconciled to God. Instead of being consumed by the wrath of God, we bask in the unconditional love of God.

One last thing. I said before no one can love unless they have been loved. You have been and are loved by Almighty God. He is the prime lover, the first unloved lover. But He is not the final one. His love flows through you, His people to others. Again, “We love because He first loved us”, and it has that same unique quality: it is love for the unlovable. Love for those who have not earned it. It is love even for your enemies.

We were enemies of God, but because of the self-sacrificing love of Christ, we were made friends. Indeed, in Holy Baptism, you are the adopted children of our Heavenly Father, holy and dearly loved of God. Amen.