

# Written Copy: Colossians 1:9-14 “How Can I Love My Enemy?”

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Text: Colossians 1:9-14

<sup>9</sup> And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

## The text's intent

Paul celebrates with the Colossians as well as remind them of all that they've received through the preaching of the Gospel, and how the Spirit has worked mightily and powerfully in their lives. Through His work of faith beginning in baptism they have been delivered out of the devil's rule over them through the paying of the ransom price which is Jesus body and blood given into death on the cross. They have been transferred into the gracious loving reign and rule of the Lord. Now in firmly in Jesus control the Spirit is at work through the same Gospel Message to grow their knowledge and understanding of God and His will, as well as their ability to accept and follow it. The Spirit creates and grows the fruits of the Spirit in their lives by which they perform good and pleasing works filled with self-sacrificing love and live good and pleasing lives that are a witness to the Gospel that saved them. As saints who have been pardoned of all of their sins, they have been rendered fit to receive the inheritance that is life with Christ now and eternal life to come. This wonderful gift is protected by the presence of God Himself so that no one or no thing can harm it or take it away.

## Focus Statement:

The power for us to live a life of self-sacrificing service and love comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. Through it He applies the ransom payment that transfers us out of the devil's rule, where we are encouraged to be self-serving, and into the gracious reign and rule of our Savior where He grows within us head knowledge and heart knowledge of Jesus and His love and restores our ability to know and do God's will. He uses the Gospel to move us to live lives that are pleasing to Him and witness the love of Christ through good works generated by the fruits of the Spirit. Through Jesus' saving work, we are declared qualified to receive our portion of the eternal inheritance, which is ours now, and protected by God for the eternity to come

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

As we hear God's OT call to sacrificially love our fellow man, as well as Jesus' directive that the neighbor we are to serve and unselfishly love includes our enemies, we wonder just how we are really supposed to accomplish what stands opposed to what our sinful hearts desire

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Work through the means of grace to deepen our knowledge of Christ and His love and allow the Spirit to generate and grow in us His fruits that manifest themselves in works of love for our Christian neighbor and those we consider our enemy (those not like us that we do not know).

## Subject Sentence: Life in His kingdom means sacrificial loving of others

## **Introduction: Today's Theme-Love My Neighbor as Myself**

There is a reoccurring theme among our Scripture lessons today. Did you happen to pick up on it? **Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.** We've heard that before, right? Don't take vengeance or hold a grudge against your own people but love them like you love yourself. OK. Who are my people? You are! You, my brothers and sisters in Christ. OK, I can handle that. I can love and forgive you for most things...except maybe falling asleep during the sermon. Nah, not really, I can forgive that too. For the most part we as brothers and sisters can love each other in that way. Not perfectly, mind you, but good enough to get along.

We hear that command repeated in our Gospel Lesson: **Luke 10:25-28** <sup>25</sup> **And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** <sup>26</sup> **He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** <sup>27</sup> **And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."** <sup>28</sup> **And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."** Once again you might say to yourself, "I got this. Not perfectly mind you, but as long as my neighbor is my friend or my brother/sister in Christ, I can walk down this road. I'm a loving and forgiving person, right? And as long as they are like me, I can love them like I do myself.

### **Meditating on: "Who Is My Neighbor"**

But then, that pesky lawyer had to seek a qualifying and justifying answer from Jesus! **Luke 10:29** **But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"** He's saying, "Hey Jesus, I know what the Law says in Leviticus. And I'm fairly certain I've got that covered. After all, I'm a lawyer, a scribe, one who is not only dedicated to knowing the Law but also living it. I know I'm OK if my neighbor is a fellow scribe or Pharisee, someone who like me lives according to God's laws. And that's who my neighbor is, right? But Jesus gives him the answer that he doesn't want to hear, and truth be told, neither do we.

Jesus describes what kind of love we should have, how it should play out in our lives. It shows itself when someone is willing to sacrificially give of his time, talents, and treasures to a stranger. It shows itself when a man is walking down a road and, when he encounters a stranger who has been robbed, viciously beaten up and left for dead, rather than act like two of the man's countrymen, two of the man's neighbors, he stops. He is on his way on a business trip, but stops to help this stranger, sacrificially giving of his time. Then he proceeds to bandage his wounds, giving of his own supplies of oil and wine, and some kind of cloth for bandaging the wounds. Then he gives up his animal, choosing to walk rather than ride to take this man to the nearest inn, giving more of his time and effort to help a stranger. At the inn he continues to care for him, giving more of his time. Then as he must

leave, he gives of his treasure to make sure the stranger is cared for, nursed to health, with the promise that any additional cost be charged to his account. Now that's a pretty tall order for you and me. But that's how Jesus calls us to love our neighbor: sacrificially and unconditionally.

But here's the kicker. Our real struggle comes when we meditate on the relationship between the two men: one is a Jew, the other is a Samaritan. That means that in the world these men would not be friends, or acquaintances, or even what we would consider neighbors. They would be enemies. So, if you were the Samaritan on the road, who in your life would be the man robbed, beaten, and dying on the road that Jesus is saying you must love sacrificially and unconditionally? How about the person who took your job at work and got you fired, the person who stepped in and stole your spouse, the person who slammed into your brand-new car, the person who wasn't careful as they mowed their yard and kicked up rocks that damaged the siding on your house, the person who's bringing an unjust lawsuit against you? It would be the person that you hate and consider to be your enemy. Could Jesus' really be saying go sacrificially love them?

Well, there is this point standing against that assertion: Jesus was giving a "Law" answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" And when we look to the Law, to what we must do to be saved, the answer is always, "Keep the law perfectly". And we know that is not possible. We know we are not saved by the Law, but by grace through faith in Christ alone and His work on the cross and the empty tomb. Fair enough. But listen to Jesus' conclusion to this parable: **Luke 10:36-37** <sup>36</sup> **Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"** <sup>37</sup> **He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."** You go and do likewise. Now that is a law statement. But we Lutherans recognize three uses of the Law. It's definitely the 2<sup>nd</sup> use, the Mirror, because the Law always shows us our sin. It's for this purpose Jesus told the parable. But could it be, for you and I who confess salvation by grace through faith, also the 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the Law? Could this be Jesus telling us how to live in the world as His redeemed and forgiven believers? As members of His Church does, does He really expect us to love our enemies, not to be saved, but because we are saved?

Paul, in His letter to the Church in Rome, writing to those who believe they are saved by grace through faith, says this in **Romans 12:20-21** <sup>20</sup> **"if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."** <sup>21</sup> **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Suddenly, I'm not so sure I've got this "love my neighbor as myself" command under control. It sure seems like Jesus expects me to live out my life of faith loving sacrificially and unconditionally my enemies. Suddenly, I think that I'm failing at it pretty miserably? How about you? The answer is yes, we are failing at it, but that's OK when we have faith in Jesus.

## **Loving in a worthy manner through Baptism**

Paul tells us in **Colossians 1:13-14** <sup>13</sup> **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,** <sup>14</sup> **in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** The domain of darkness that Paul mentions is the kingdom of the devil, or the place where he rules. This is not so much a temporal place, although it certainly seems as if the devil is ruling in many portions of our world today. But Paul is speaking of spiritual truths, and not of earthly kingdoms. Because we were born in sin, we say we were born into the kingdom of the devil, or that we were born with the devil having control over our hearts and thoughts. No, I'm not speaking of possession, although the devil can certainly still do that. The devil is in control of our hearts and minds when he has us just where he wants us, whenever we allow anyone or anything to have first place in our hearts other than Jesus. And that includes when we are on the throne reigning over our lives, when we choose to do what pleases us first, what's good for us first. And if there is someone we like, that is like us, that does good things for us, then sure, we will help them out (up to a point). But even then, if we are called to sacrifice too much of our time, talents, and treasures things can get a little difficult.

But then along came Jesus who delivered us out of the control of Satan, and of our own sinful selfish nature. Paul says He redeemed us, meaning He paid the ransom price to remove us from bondage to sin, death, and the devil. And the ransom price that had to be paid was His blood, His life force, His body given over into suffering and death in place of our own. And with His resurrection He guaranteed that the ransom price was paid in full and accepted by the LORD God, judge of all. With this price paid the door was open for the transfer into Jesus' kingdom, into His reign and rule.

Now it's not like when we were released from the devil's kingdom, we had to stumble around to find Jesus' kingdom. His reign and rule came to us, just as it came to Evelyn Nicole today, in Baptism. Baptism makes this kingdom transfer a reality for her, just as it did for you. In Baptism the Holy Spirit stormed the fortress of what was your sin-filled heart. He broke all the bonds, ripped out all the wiring, and destroyed all the ways the devil had a hold of and control of you. He removed you from the throne of your heart and placed Jesus there to reign and rule by faith. Baptism made Jesus your Lord and Savior.

That being said, as those who have been called out of darkness and into Jesus' kingdom of light and life, how come you and I still struggle to live as Jesus calls us to? How come we still struggle to love our neighbors as well as our enemies? Because the work the Holy Spirit began at your baptism is not completed yet.

That's why Paul says to the Colossian believers (**Colossians 1:9-11**) <sup>9</sup> **And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,** <sup>10</sup> **so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.** <sup>11</sup> **May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.** Paul continues to pray for those whom the Spirit has begun the work of making them holy, making them like Jesus, forming them to walk in a manner worthy to be called a Christian. It's a process where the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God and the Sacraments, fills us with the knowledge of who Jesus is, what He has done for us, and what is that wonderous love which moved Him to give His life for those who were His enemies. He is at work to give spiritual wisdom and understanding of His will to us, so that we can know what He want us to do, and what kind of life He want us to live. He gives to us the knowledge to understand what kind of a life that is truly pleasing to Him. The Spirit is speaking this into our hearts and minds through the means of grace, the Gospel Message this day, and every day you encounter the means of grace. And He not only speaks, but He is at work within us, to move us to not only understand how Jesus would have us live but to actually put our money where our mouth is and do it. He works in us so that we bear the fruits of the Spirit and through that do works that are good and pleasing in the sight of our Savior.

Notice I said He as at work in us through these things. But we will never have them down perfect, not this side of eternity. But He grants us His power to carry on nonetheless, confessing our failures and asking forgiveness for all the ways we fail to love as Christ would have us. And He speaks those Gospel words that we are indeed are forgiven and restored as those under His reign and rule, His forgiven baptized children. Through all this our Lord is incredibly patient and loving with us. And He works in us repentant hearts that are strengthened for enduring all trials and failures we might commit, while pouring His patient and forgiving love into our hearts. It's through this powerful gift that we are given the resources needed to begin loving our enemies as our neighbors, as ourselves. He moves us to realize that we were once God's enemies, yet Christ came and stopped on the road to eternal life and gave all He had to save us. And that love that moved Him to do so is the power for us to love the Samaritans in our life too.

## **Conclusion**

There once was a Church that was walking down the road to eternal life when they saw someone who didn't look like them, dress like them, attend their worship and their functions. In fact this was the kind of person who had probably done them wrong in the past, or at least didn't consider them their friend. This Church stopped and gave of its time, talents, and treasures to help them. They were moved to do so through the redemption they received in their baptism that was paid for by their crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Because they were transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and self-love, and under His reign, rule, and gracious control, they began to live in a manner worthy of the title Christian, bearing the fruits of good works in their mission as His Church. By the way, that Church is us, and those people are you. You are those redeemed by Christ for works that are the outpouring of Jesus' love to those in need. We do that through our support for Flint Mission Network including the meals provided at Franklin Avenue Mission. We do that with our support through the baby bottle drive for Crisis Pregnancy Center of Flint, Heartbeat Crib, Carriage Town Ministries, Wellspring Lutheran Services, Lutheran World Relief among others. Are we supporting them as perfectly as we should be? No. Are we forgiven for our shortcomings? Yes indeed! The Holy Spirit continues to be at work in us, forgiving us, and growing us in faith toward Christ and in love for others, even our enemies. And He takes those imperfect works, and through our faith in Christ, turns them into good works that declare us to be walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, and fully pleasing to Him by faith. Don't wait until you're perfect. Start walking in faith and love, knowing that the Holy Spirit is at work perfecting you. Amen