

Second Sunday after the Epiphany: January 17, 2021

“What’s Love Got To Do With It?”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a perfect day for the installation of officers. The three verses before our text from Romans sets the context. Paul says, ***“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”***¹

Our Epistle text speaks more to the conduct and life of a Christian, what is known as sanctification. When you get to Romans 12, Paul has written extensively on the Gospel. He has proclaimed the realities of the baptismal life and the necessity of faith. Preaching on this section of Romans makes some Lutheran ears uncomfortable. It can easily be taken out of context, focus on you and ignore the realities of Christ. It is a text that lends itself to preaching about you, not about Christ and Him crucified.

This text is on this Second Sunday of Epiphany, and paired with a beautiful Gospel text. Jesus goes to a wedding at Cana. While there, He told by His mother that the host has run out of wine. Jesus inquires what this has to do with Him, then goes on to act in love. Just what is the work of Jesus? What is the point of His miracles? They were signs that demonstrated Jesus is God in flesh.

This is the reality in which we live. No one is to think of himself more highly than he ought. We have one head, Jesus, and He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom. We have different functions. We have different places, different vocations, different stations in life given to us by God, and He gives us the gifts to use these lives in faith towards God and love towards our neighbors.

Jesus was to die. He was appointed to give His life to pay for our sins. Last week we were reminded of His humility in being baptized into our sin, so that we could be baptized into His life.

¹ Romans 12:3–5

At the wedding at Cana, we are given not only a sign by which we know Jesus is God, we are also given an example of how the body of Christ lives in love.

To those in Christ, baptized in His name and possessing saving faith, Paul says, “***Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.***”² These words are directed at the governance of the Church. The words spoken are to correctly expound Scripture and to be only for the building up of faith. In whatever office one serves in the church, they are to attend the office with all diligence as though Christ was doing it Himself.

To all in the Church Paul says, “***Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.***”³

Looking through this list it becomes clear that actions start with will. To love genuinely is not just a feeling. Love is one of the most abused words in our modern day language. It gets used to support all kinds of self-indulgence and perversions. Love is only of two kinds. There is true, genuine love, which is only defined by God; and there is false, hypocritical love. To love God is to cling to His Word and His Commandments; to not love God is to cling to self, or the world, or anything that is not God. False love is used as a mask. It is an act to attempt to show yourself as someone you are not.

The false love purported by the world is centered in a feeling. Science defines our feelings are largely due to chemical responses in the body. Pain, pleasure, anger, sadness, and more are due to a complex network of hormones and chemicals.

When we speak of Jesus’ love for us, is this what we mean? Did Jesus’ love for us come

² Romans 12:6–8

³ Romans 12:9–16

from hormones and chemicals? Was His love for us simply raw emotion? While He was human and these processes worked in His body, His love was more than feeling. His love was action. We are told by the world over and over to love our own bodies. How much more important that Jesus, as the Head of His Church, His body, loved you with such a deep and unfettering love that He was not wise in His own sight. He associated with the lowly. He was crucified with criminals. He died for sinners. He died to rescue you from death.

You know the words, ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”***⁴

Being saved in Christ changes your will. Faith is not just a head thing, centered only on thoughts, knowledge, or intellectual prowess. Faith is not just a heart thing, focused on fleeting and momentary feelings. Faith is an entire life thing; body and soul are involved. As the dead, sinful heart is regenerated in Christ, the body lives and moves and has its being in Christ. In this new life, with the soul having peace that only Christ can give and not as the world gives, we live.

This is where things get messy. We are to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. We often speak of the devil or evil in abstract terms, but we never experience him in that way. We hear evil words. We live in evil circumstances. We watch evil deeds.

What then do we do? Paul says to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family. We may fight and we may disagree at times, but that is all inside the family, in the context of brotherly love. In Christ, we actually love one another, and if the world attacks - or threatens, we step up and stand in the gap and support one another.

As family, we want to see each other succeed. We live the Ten Commandments; not for our own good, but for the good of our neighbor. Where the world says, “Me first,” we respond, “You first.”

⁴ John 3:16–17

In all we do, we serve the Lord. We live our vocations for our neighbor to the glory of God. We use what God gave us in the light of our faith. We do whatever we can do, whatever the Lord lays before us to do, and present our bodies, and our lives as living sacrifices. We are not saved by these works. We do these works because we are already saved.

Jesus' mother got it right. She told the servants to listen to Jesus. Look at Him and simply do whatever He says. Even if it makes no sense to our feeble minds, look at His great wisdom. He knows what He is doing.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you never know who is watching. You may never be fully aware of just how God is working for others through you. When you rejoice in hope, others see it. If you believe in death and hell, and genuinely believe that you have been rescued from it for everlasting life in glory, rejoicing in Christ is all we can do; even in the midst of darkness, sin, and death in this world.

We all expect to fall asleep - that is, to suffer death of the body. Until that time is granted to us by God Himself, we live life here. He has placed you here. He has baptized you for this moment, for this day, for this time. He gives you what you need, and who you need to endure. You never suffer alone.

The newly elected officers will soon be installed to serve the members of Immanuel in different ways using their unique talents and gifts. As we serve together, may we do so in love; true and genuine love. Love that confronts the sinner with the truth, and calls to repentance. Love that shows the sinner where his sins are washed away and he is reconciled to God. Love centered on Christ without hypocrisy, hating evil, directing sinners to the One thing needed for all people everywhere – Jesus. Amen.

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

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form
Second Sunday after the Epiphany (B)
17 January 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. O Lord, You have called us into the fellowship and priesthood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. By His incarnation and great work of salvation, heaven is opened to us in Him. Give us boldness to cling to Your faithful call, that Your deliverance would not be hidden but spoken freely in all the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, preserve Your Church here and throughout the world. Send forth laborers into Your harvest and sustain those You have sent, especially Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; and Sam, our circuit visitor. Make all Christians bold in confession and unwavering in prayer. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, You have given us Your Holy Spirit, making our bodies Your temple and knitting us together into the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us courage and constancy to treasure Your gift of holy marriage. Preserve Your Christians in true chastity: the married in honorable faithfulness to one another, and the unmarried in honorable purity, for You have bought us with the precious price of Your Son's blood to glorify You in our bodies. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Father in heaven, from You comes all rule and authority over the nations of the world for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do well. Graciously regard Your servants, those who make, administer, and judge the laws of this nation, and look in mercy upon all the rulers of the earth. Grant that all who receive the sword as Your servants may bear it according to Your command. Enlighten and defend them, and grant them wisdom and understanding that under their peaceable governance Your people may be guarded and directed in righteousness, quietness, and unity. Protect and prolong their lives that we with them may show forth the praise of Your name; bless and keep all public servants, including our armed forces, police and first responders, and by Your mercy send peace in our time. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, behold in mercy all for whom we pray [*Carmen, Susan, Linda Freese, Zoey, Jen Zebuhr, Gordon Robbins, Keith Teggatz, Mary Ann Teggatz, and those we name in our hearts*]. Bring healing, comfort, strength, patience and certainty to all in need. Receive our thanks for Your constant watch and merciful kindness. In every sorrow and every joy, do not let our eyes be drawn from the greater marvel of Your kindness in Christ Jesus, by whose grace and forgiveness alone we receive every blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Susan and Piper* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, renew the gift of Your Holy Spirit to all who commune this day. Work in us true contrition to lament and abandon our sins, and so to come in confident faith to eat Your Son's body and drink His blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**