

Sermon for March 4, 2012 – Lent 2

Romans 5:5b-11

Theme: God demonstrates his own love for us!

- 1) Through the death of Christ (6-8)
- 2) For the assurance of salvation (9-11)

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 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, 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! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

“Do you love me?” Have you ever asked God that question before? What motivated you to ask it? Was it because of some sin you committed, that you thought God would never forgive? Dear Christian, nothing can ever keep God from loving you. Still, the devil plagues us with doubts.

“God, do you love me?” “Yes I do,” is God’s answer, “Let me show you how much.” Today, with St. Paul as our guide, we are going to consider how **God demonstrated his own love for us!** 1) *Through the death of His Son.* 2) *For the assurance of Salvation*

Part 1: Through the death of Christ

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Three times, in our text, St. Paul defines God’s love for us as the death of Jesus. I think it is clear: if you love someone, you will be willing to sacrifice your happiness for that person’s benefit, and ultimate love makes the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus himself told us this when he said, *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).* Yes, Jesus’ death truly shows love beyond anything we deserve.

Now I think it would be wrong to say that humans don’t show life-sacrificing love. I think ANYBODY here would die to protect their family, if that were called for. Even for certain strangers, like a child in danger, we might consider dying. But let me ask you this: How many of you would consider dying to save an Islamic terrorist? Would you lay down your life to try to save your worst enemy?

And this is what is so amazing about God’s love: Jesus died for us while we were still *ungodly, sinners and his enemies*. To be ungodly means to have absolutely no fear or respect for God. All people, outside of Christ, are totally ungodly, including us, according to our sinful nature. Want proof? Just take time to think about your heart – how we often think the worst instead of the best of people; how we can rage against God in our heart about how unfair we think our life is; how when we are at Church, we often think about all the other places we would rather be than listening to a sermon; and how easy it for us to spend an extra \$50 on entertainment, but how hard it is to put an extra \$5 in the offering plate. Our hearts betray our ungodly priorities.

Not only are we by nature ungodly, but we are also powerless to save ourselves. We had no ability, whatsoever, to improve our relationship with God. *We were dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1).* You know as well as I do, that dead people can’t save themselves. They’re dead. And so, outside of Christ, we had absolutely no hope of becoming God’s friends. Actually our condition was so bad, that we didn’t even want to be friends with God.

But God demonstrated his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Only when we understand our true condition outside of Christ, do we begin to grasp the magnitude of God’s love for us. You see, while we were still powerless, wretched God haters, who were running away from God, God decided to love us. God decided to love us so much, that he sent his Son into the world to die for us. Just think of it: Christ Jesus, *being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8)!* And in this way *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).* God punished his Son for us. He did this without our begging or asking of him. He did this while we still hated him. In this way God demonstrated his awesome love for us.

And God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. For most of us here that happened first on the day the blessed water of baptism was poured on our heads. Through baptism the Lord clothed us in Christ’s righteousness, and put

his name on our hearts by giving us faith in Jesus. At our baptism God declared in heaven, "You are my son. You are my daughter. Today I have become your Father."

Every time we hear the Gospel, God pours His love into our hearts. Every time we go to Holy Communion and receive the very body and blood Christ's used to win our salvation, we are reassured of God's love. Every time we use the Word and Sacraments our faith grabs hold of God's love for us in Christ. This is why it is so important to make regular use of these means of grace.

"God, do you love me? There are times when I doubt because I know my sinfulness." Dear Christian, when your soul burdens you like this, look to the cross. God demonstrated his love for us there when Christ died for us. He chose to love us, even though we did nothing to deserve it. But that's really the point of God's love, isn't it: To love us so as to reconcile us, and bring us into a new restored relationship with God. This is the purpose of God demonstrating his love to us in Christ's death.

Part 2: For the assurance of salvation (9-11)

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him. Jesus died so we could be justified.

The word justify is a legal term, related to the word justice. To be just is to be upright and innocent. To be justified means to be declared not guilty of something. Imagine a courtroom in which we are standing on trial. The judge is the almighty God whom we have offended. The prosecutor is Satan, whose name means "accuser," because He not only tempts us in to sin, but constantly accuses us when we do sin. Now Satan presents to the judge all the ways we broke the Law. Every single sin the Satan accuses us of, we know we committed. It looks like we can never be justified. But then our great defense attorney enters the court: Jesus Christ. He pleads our case before God. Our attorney, Jesus, even goes so far as to pay our penalty. He says to the judge, "Yes, my client did commit these crimes, but look: every single crime he committed, I paid for as if I myself did it. There is nothing he can be accused of any longer." Seeing the proof of what our defense attorney has done for us, there can only be one verdict: not guilty. The judge justifies us, and we are free.

God has declared us not guilty of sin because our punishment has been paid in full by the blood of Christ. If our eternal judge acquits us, is there any reason we have to be afraid of God's wrath? Is there any reason why we have to doubt God's love? No. Through faith in Christ we are saved from God's wrath.

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! By means of Christ's death, God has established a new relationship with us: instead of being His enemies, we can now be His children through faith in His Son. We enter this new relationship with God by repenting of our sins and believing that God forgives us for Christ's sake.

Now that we have been reconciled with God, and have entered this new relationship with Him through faith in Christ, is there anything we have to worry about? No. We know that, because Jesus rose from the dead, we too will rise from the dead on the last day to receive eternal life, as Jesus himself says: "*Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19)."

Isn't it wonderful: the absolute love God has shown us absolute sinners! Now that Jesus has died for us, there is nothing we must be afraid of, as Paul says later on in Romans: [If God] *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)?* And God promises to give us all things. He has made us kings and priests in his kingdom. He has given us eternal life. Because Jesus sacrificed himself to give us all these blessings, we can say with St. Paul: *I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38,39).*

"God, do you love me? I feel like I can never be good enough for you to love me." Dear Christian, when your heart tempts you with such thoughts, consider this: **We will never be** good enough to deserve God's forgiveness. But that is exactly why he came into the world: to show his undeserved love by forgiving us undeserving sinners. Let me illustrate it this way. Could I in anyway deserve it that you would kill your son or daughter for me? Obviously not! Then what makes us think that we can earn the sacrifice of God's Son? We can't. But God did this willingly because of His great love us for us, as it is written: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

Does God love you? For that answer look no further than the cross and see what God did to save you. And may that answer lead you to follow him in love and faith – willing to give up everything Him, as He gave up everything for you. Amen.