

Jesus Lives!

5th Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2009

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Hecla

Zion Lutheran Church, Ipswich

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bowdle

Text: John 13:34-35 - ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

Theme: “I Believe in the Holy Christian Church”

LOVE - A Birthmark on the Body of Christ

Dear fellow sinners who have been redeemed, restored, and forgiven by Jesus precious blood and justified through His resurrection from the dead, grace and peace!

No two people look the same, right? Unless of course they siamese are twins. While no two people may look the same, many people can look very similar. Consider the descriptions we hear on the news of a person that the police are looking for. The suspect is described as a white male in his early 30's, roughly six foot four inches tall, weighing about 200 lbs, with brown hair. There are many people that could match that description. In fact, I match that description - the police could be looking for me! To distinguish between two similar looking suspects, the police often include any marks on the body - such as tattoos, scars, or birthmarks. Such distinguishing marks make it easier to identify which tall, skinny, white male in their 30's they are looking for.

Two weeks ago we began to take a look at what the bible teaches about the Holy Christian Church. We heard Jesus tell us that the Holy Christian Church is made up of one flock and one Shepherd. This one Holy Christian Church is made up only of those who believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Can you tell who is a member of the Holy Christian Church and who is not simply by looking at them? Do believers look any different than unbelievers? On the outside there is absolutely no difference. The Christian believer looks like any other human being. The difference is inside, in the heart. Scripture tells us that all people are born into this world dead in their trespasses and sins. The difference with the Christian is that the Holy Spirit has created spiritual life in his heart and led him to faith in Jesus Christ. This may have happened much as it did for little Isaiah Grams last Sunday, when he was baptized in the name of the Triune God. God entered Isaiah's heart, by water and the Word, created faith in his heart, and made Isaiah a member of His family.

While we cannot tell the difference between the believer and the unbeliever simply by looking at them, there are some distinguishing marks which are seen in the life of the believer. Jesus calls these distinguishing features of the Christians “fruits” which flow from faith in Him. ***“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”*** (Jn 15:5) Good works will flow from the heart of the believer. And so the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, has birthmarks, if you will. Jesus speaks of one such birthmark in our text. As we consider what we believe about the Holy Christian Church, let us how love is a birthmark on the body of Christ. May the

Holy Spirit bless our study of His holy word!

If we are going to talk about love, I suppose it is wise to consider what love is. The word love is used very freely today. Boyfriends and girlfriends who hardly know each other speak of how much they “love” each other, when in reality they probably love the idea of having a boyfriend or girlfriend. Today, love is associated with a feeling or an emotion. When couples first date or are first married, there is a certain euphoric or warm and fuzzy feeling they have when they are together. Some call that feeling, “Being in love.” But as time goes on, that feeling fades. Thus many married couples divorce because they don’t have that euphoric feeling when they are together with that person. That is why you might hear someone say, “We got a divorce because I realized I didn’t love him/her anymore.” Because their emotion faded, they thought there was no reason to remain together any longer.

But when Jesus uses the word “love” in our text, He is not speaking of some emotional feeling in the pit of your stomach which comes and goes. The word for love that Jesus uses carries with it much more power. This word for love is an action, not an emotion. This is love that does something for someone else. In 1 Corinthians 13, often called the love chapter, we heard Paul (in our New Testament reading) speak of what love does. It suffers long - love puts up with a lot. Love is kind. Love does not get jealous. Love is not interested in self, but interested in the welfare of others first. Love does not rejoice when someone gets what’s coming to them. Love does not think evil about others.

This is the love that Jesus speaks of in our text when He says, “*As I have loved you.*” This love was on display throughout the entire life and even in the death of Jesus. To understand just how broad, how deep, and how high His love is for us, we need examine what type of people we are. Paul writes to the Romans, “*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.*” (Rom 5:7) You have probably heard of war stories where a soldier threw his body on top of a grenade to save the lives of his fellow soldiers. He gave up his life to save their lives. But whoever heard of a soldier falling on a grenade to save the life of his enemy?! Yet that is what the love of God led Jesus to do. Paul continues in Romans 5, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom 5:8)

Jesus didn’t die for us because He knew what good Lutherans we would be or because we were patriotic Americans. It wasn’t as though Jesus died for us because we were righteous people or even good people. We were SINNERS and Christ died for us! As sinners we were the very opposite of what God wanted us to be. He is holy, righteous, and just. We are unrighteous sinners. We were at enmity with God. He told us what His will was for us and we disobeyed Him. We have not used the bodies He has given to us for godly purposes. We have not used the minds God has given us to think about godly things. We have not used the mouths God has given us to speak about godly topics. We have not used the eyes God has given us to look at godly things. We are sinners. We have disobeyed and rebelled against our Creator in every way imaginable.

And yet what did the love of Christ lead Him to do for such wretched, rebellious sinners as us? Christ died for us! THAT IS LOVE. Love in action. Love that does something for another with total disregard for self. Love that was only interested in the well-being of the other. Love that gives and gives and gives, even unto death! Love in spite of all that we did and failed to do.

And so Jesus says in our text, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** As Jesus has loved us with that self-sacrificing love, He says, so love one another this same way.

How have we done keeping this new commandment of our Savior? Have unbelievers noticed that we must be followers of Jesus because of the love we have for one another? Sadly, we must confess that our thoughts about one another have often been less than loving. Our words to each other and about each other have often been less than loving. So many times we have put the WORST construction on things, rather than in love bearing all things, believing all things, and hoping all things. So often we think our fellow Christian has to EARN our love before we will give it to them. How horribly and sinfully selfish we have been with our love!

One time when Jesus was talking about forgiveness our fellow Christian, Peter showed just how stingy we like to be with our love when he asked, ***“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*** (Mt 18:22) If a fellow believer sins against me, how many times should I forgive him before I can cut him off? Peter probably thought that forgiving him seven times was being MORE than gracious. I say that Peter probably thought that, because that is what I would have thought too!

Jesus shows us that love is to prevail even when someone who should know better sins against you. Reply to Peter’s question, ***“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*** (Mt 18:23) We should be more than ready to forgive our brother up to 490 times! That is, forgive them until you lose count how many times you have forgiven him. That is loving one another as Jesus has loved us. Thank God that He was willing to forgive us more than seven times. He has forgiven us for ALL of the times which we have sinned against Him. As our great load of sin against God has been forgiven in love, we should be more than ready to forgive much smaller offenses from our fellow believers!

This is the love Jesus is talking about in our text. Love that doesn’t keep score. Love that gives and gives, looking for nothing in return. It is love that is based on the love Jesus has for each one of us. This love we have for one another is a birth-mark, a visible mark on the life of the believers. ***“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** When an unbeliever sees the way we love one another it is a witness to them that we are fellow members of the body of Christ. We don’t love each other because he or she deserves it. In fact most probably don’t deserve our love. But which one of us deserved the love of Christ?

This love we have for one another is evidence of the Spirit worked faith in our hearts. It is visible evidence that we are members of the Holy Christian Church. John writes in his first epistle, ***We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. ...By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*** (1Jn 3:14, 16) This love is a birthmark on the body of Christ. It is the love of Christ showing itself in our lives amongst one another.

So it is true that, externally, we may look no different than an unbeliever, but by the grace of God our lives look much different. Their lives are marked by selfish love, our lives are marked by selfless love - loving one another as Christ has loved us. Love is a birthmark on the body of Christ. May Christ ***dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ...and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*** (Eph 3:17,19) Amen.