

Sermon for April 14, 2024 – Easter 3

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (EHV)

Theme: Christ's love compels us...

1. To live for him (14-15)
2. To love others (16-17)
3. To proclaim the Gospel (18-21)

¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again. ¹⁶As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way. ¹⁷So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come! ¹⁸And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, because God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

People love to share news they consider important or exciting. For example, Beyonce fans are talking about her country-themed album and “Swifties” are abuzz about the new music Taylor is about to drop. TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are full of people passionately talking about things they think will bring purpose, meaning, or happiness to other people’s lives. Sadly, almost all of it is emotional sugar – offering you a temporary high that will lead to an emotional crash and leave you wanting more.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has given us a message far more important than what new music is about to be released, life hacks on dating, what shows to watch, or which politician is leading in the polls. Jesus Christ, our Saviour, rose from the dead – just as he promised! And he did not do this so everyone would think he was cool - showering him with likes and shares on social media. No, he did it to show that he paid for all sin and reconciled humanity to God. The Easter message God entrusted to us has profound meaning and impact for everyone. Let us take some time to think about those things and how they move us to want to tell others about Jesus, under the theme: **Christ's love compels us...** 1) To live for him, 2) to love others, 3) to proclaim the Gospel.

Part One: Christ's love compels us to live for him.

A lot of people called the apostle Paul crazy for preaching the Gospel. Some even threatened his life. But that did not stop him and his companions from doing all they could to get people to know Jesus. Why? He tells us in the first verse of our sermon text:

¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died.

How great is Jesus' love for humanity? So great that he didn't just die for the good or pretty good people in the world. No, he died for all.

But that invites the question: why did Jesus feel compelled to give up his life for us? Because our selfish, sinful natures had separated us from God and doomed us to everlasting separation from him in hell. Let me briefly explain what I mean.

The LORD created Adam and Eve good and holy, desiring to love God and others above self. That changed when Adam and Eve trusted the devil and disobeyed God's command. From that moment on, they separated themselves from God. Their natures were corrupted – having become selfish and self-serving. Worse yet, this corrupted, self-serving nature has been passed down from generation to generation, infecting everyone. It is the reason people often act brutally towards one another – ignoring the needs of those who need help and taking advantage of them. Worse yet, it's the reason we are separated from God and live under the threat of hell.

But God did not want us lost to hell. No, he wanted to save us from our sins and restore our relationship with him. This is why he took it upon himself to save us – taking on flesh and blood so he could keep the law perfectly in our place. Having done that, he died for the world's sins – paying for them all. Why? St. Paul tells us in the following verse:

¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.

Everything Jesus did was for a purpose: not so that we continue living selfishly, but to be united with him through faith. Yes, just as Jesus died and was raised to show that all sins were paid for in full, Jesus wants us to live new and holy lives to his glory – understanding that everything he teaches and commands is for our good. The more time we spend basking in the love Christ has for us, the more we want to live for him – showing love to him in return.

But that invites the question: how can we show love to Christ in response to his great love for us? Jesus answered that question on the eve of his crucifixion, when he told his disciples: ³⁴*“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*¹

Part Two: Christ's love compels us to love others.

Yes, Christ's saving love not only compels us to live for him but to love others, as the apostle Paul states:

¹⁶As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way. ¹⁷So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come!

Before the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts, we were like the rest of the world — living according to the desires of our flesh. We were selfish and viewed our relationship with people in a self-serving way. We even went so far as to view our relationship with God in such a manner.

But that all changed when the Holy Spirit awakened repentance in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments. His law revealed our sins and the punishment we deserve from God. His Gospel pointed us to Jesus – and the great, forgiving love God has for us in Him. The message of Christ’s love changed us. Instead of loving sin, we now hate it. Instead of trying to avoid God to do our own thing, we follow him in trust — wanting to do what he desires. And what does God desire? That we love all other people the same way he loves them – desiring their salvation every bit as much as He desires it. Our old way of seeing people as a means to an end is gone. Instead, we are new in Christ - wanting to show all people the same mercy God shows us in Jesus.

Part Three: Christ’s love compels us to proclaim the Gospel.

¹⁸And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.

Just as the sun's light is so brilliant that the moon can't help but reflect it, God's love for us in Christ is so magnificent we can't help but channel it to others. And that is from God! He designed our salvation in such a way that we get to participate in his mission of saving souls by telling others about how he reconciled them to Himself in Christ Jesus.

The word “reconcile” literally means to “bring back together.” In a financial sense, it means balancing accounts – transferring funds if needed. In a relational sense, it means bringing people who were once friends but now enemies back together in harmony. Both senses apply to what Jesus has done for humanity. Let me explain how.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, there has been an irreconcilable break in humanity's relationship with God. How so? Because God created us to be righteous – that is to say, always on the “right” side of things, in harmony with his good and gracious will. Sin made us selfish, breaking our relationship with God. We can't give God the righteousness we owe him because we don't have it. Every human being has strayed from God.

But the LORD did not want us lost. This is why he took it upon himself to reconcile all people to himself. How? By *not counting their trespasses against them*, that is to say, by forgiving all their sins. God did that not only for those who believed in Jesus but also for the whole world. And he wants us to tell the world this good news so that they would stop fighting against him. He wants all people to turn to him in trust and live in the peace of this reconciliation.

I can't stress this fact enough: God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. He wants all people to repent of their sins, be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth.ⁱⁱ For that reason, God has entrusted us with the message of His reconciliation.

But why would God entrust this message to us instead of his holy angels? Well, think of it this way: who would serve as a better spokesperson for a diet company: someone who was always healthy or a formerly morbidly obese person who was transformed by the company's diet? The latter, of course. And this is why God wants us Christians, formerly lost to sin but reconciled to God through Christ, to serve as living examples for others of what God's grace has accomplished.

²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Did you catch that? God is making his appeal to the world through us Christians. God! And why is that so amazing? Because God owes humanity nothing. He is the Creator, and we are his creation. We are the ones that sinned; He was sinned against. Nevertheless, God loves the world so much that he sent Jesus to save it. Moreover, God is the one who reaches out to the world through us, inviting everyone to be reconciled to him. Notice the appeal is not to "reconcile yourself" but to "be" reconciled, or to say it another way: trust that God has done the work of reconciliation. He has forgiven your sins. He has restored your relationship with him.

But how did God do that? Did he forget about our sins - leaving them unpunished? Did he let the debt of righteousness we owed him go unpaid? No, God's justice could not do that. So, how did God solve the dilemma of our sins? Paul tells us in the last verse.

²¹God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Did you know there is no statement like that in any other religion?

God sent his Son Jesus, both true God and true man, to live a life of perfect obedience to God's law in our place. He earned the righteousness we need to stand before God. Not only that, but he took upon himself our debt of sin to suffer and die for it in our place. Yes, when God looked at Jesus on the cross, he saw every sin that has or ever will be committed – even those of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao! Jesus became sin personified and suffered for them all. He died. After three days, God raised him from the dead – just as he promised. Why? As proof that all humanity's sins have been paid for in full. God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Through faith (that is to say, through trust in his work), Christ's righteousness is applied to us. We are at peace with God and granted a new and everlasting life in harmony with Him that will be fully realized when He comes again on the last day.

That, brothers and sisters in Christ, is the meaningful message God wants you to share with the world. Whenever you feel inadequate to tell others about Jesus – fearful of how others might receive your message – meditate on just how great God's love is for you in Christ. Spend time with Jesus in His Word and let His great love compel you to live for him by loving others. And what is the greatest love you can show the people God puts in your life? Telling them the good news of Jesus so they can be reconciled to God. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. John 13:34-35 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11 & 1 Timothy 2:4