

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
October 20, 2013**

***“Christ’s Love, Our Calling”
Year 4: Love Speaks***

Romans 5:6-11

Love Speaks Unconditionally

- 1. From personal experience**
- 2. For anyone to experience**

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Romans 5:6-11 –

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.

Would the new guy be accepted? That was the thought as the varsity team gathered in the gym for the first practice of the year. It was an exciting time of optimism as they thought ahead to the schedule of games coming. And there was that new person there, the new kid who had transferred into school. Everyone else eyed that new person up as practice was about to begin. Would he fit in? As they did some drills, it quickly became evident that this new person had played a lot in the past. He was

passing deftly, dribbling easily with both hands, and beating everyone down the floor. He was spotting the open man to pass the ball to and was hitting his shots regularly. How did the other players respond? Enthusiastically! This is going to be exciting! Since they saw they would benefit from this person, they talked it up with him, slapped high fives, and welcomed him pretty quickly.

That’s an example of how our loyalty and acceptance is often conditional. We ask what a person has that can potentially help me, as a condition of acceptance!

Even love and marriage can be the same way. Many a pastor has counseled two spouses who are having great difficulties getting along and have heard one of them say, “I don’t love them anymore, but if they start doing x, y, and z, then I will love them.” We often place conditions on our loyalty, acceptance, and love.

As we close our service series we have been in for a number of weeks called **“Love Speaks,”** we focus on a reading from Romans 5 that describes how God loves and thus how we speak. The Apostle Paul’s words in Scripture remind us that **“Love Speaks Unconditionally.”** **We will learn from his words that love speaks unconditionally:**

- 1. From personal experience**
- 2. For anyone to experience**

1. From personal experience

We heard in our reading: *“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... When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”* Paul gives us some deep words to think about. How did God treat us? And how can we compare our love and actions to God’s, in order to try to fathom what he did?

Paul brings up the point: Whom would you help? *“For a good man someone might possibly dare to die.”* Would you help a “good” person?

- Would you help that good neighbor who helped you do your roofing project?
- Would you help that friendly mailman whom you've talked to from time to time, and who is a really nice guy?

I'd imagine you would, most likely. We would enjoy helping someone else who has been kind and helpful to us.

Would you die for them? Hmmmm. That would require some more thought. If their life was perilously in danger, would you risk your life to push them out of the way of danger? Or to rush to help them in a burning vehicle? Would you risk your life for them? Would you die for them? Paul says possibly. I think you'd say the same.

What about someone who is "powerless?" Would you help them?

- If you saw a little child who can't reach the drinking fountain, would you help them? Would you give them a lift?
- If you saw an elderly person on the crowded light rail, would you give them your seat?
- What about the drowning victim who is in the deep end of the pool and out of energy?

Again, I think I'd answer that you probably would. Perhaps you'd be self-absorbed and not see them, or maybe you'd be having a crabby day and keep your seat for yourself, but I'd like to think that probably you would help them.

Would you die for them? Hmmmm. That might require some more thought. What would you be sacrificing in your life to die for them?

What about a "sinner?" What about the "ungodly?" Would you help them?

- What about the drug addict in the fetal position on the side of the road downtown?
- What about the drug dealer headed for a shootout as you drive through a rough part of town?
- What about the prostitute that you spot on Pacific Highway?

Would you stop to help? Would you help those people who are not worshiping God in their lives or following his ways? Would you die for them?

Paul goes even farther. What about your enemies?

- What about the large bully at school who has struck fear in your life and made your life miserable?
- What about the drunk driver who killed your sister?
- What about the leader of the rival business that is running your business into the ground?
- What about the adulterer who has stolen the heart of your husband or wife?

Would you help them if you heard that they needed assistance? Would you die for them?

The stark truth of what Paul is saying here is that we are these wretched people. We were spiritually powerless to help or save ourselves. We had a terminal condition called sin, which only leads to a place called hell, where the just wrath of God would rightly put us. We have been the ungodly and the sinner, making our idols in our heart and going our own sinful, selfish ways. We have even been God's enemy, for *"the sinful mind is hostile to God."* Our sinful nature delights in sin and has thumbed its nose at the Lord's commands for godly living.

So what did God do? *"Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* When we were in direct opposition to him, God showed unconditional love. He sent his Son to be our Savior. When we were godless sinners, he gave us a Savior who would go so far as to die on a cross for our sin and guilt. When we went our own way, God planned our salvation in the death of his own Son for our sake. **He won our salvation with his unconditional love!**

The result of this are some vivid words that Paul uses here:

- We have been justified – We are declared “not guilty” in God’s court! We have been declared innocent.
- We have been reconciled – Our relationship with our Maker is repaired. This was symbolized most vividly when the curtain in the Temple was torn in two when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Access is possible, once again!
- And the effects of what God’s unconditional love has accomplished will go on in the present and our future. Paul wrote, *“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!... How much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”* Not only has our “not guilty” verdict been declared by that curtain, but now as we look at the future our salvation through our trials and temptations is certain. Our final deliverance from this doomed world will happen!

Therefore, as our love speaks in the world today, it speaks from personal experience.

There is a difference, after all, between speaking and speaking from personal experience. (counselor vs. recovered person)

Love speaks unconditionally from personal experience.

2. For anyone to experience

Paul give us another thought to contemplate in our text in v. 11: *“Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*

The word “rejoice” here is an interesting one. Literally, it means “to boast, to glory, to exult proudly.” It could very likely come from a root word that pictures a person’s upright neck, holding the head high with confidence. I don’t know if you’ve ever taught a class before, but the picture I get from this word is that of one of the students who knows the answer to the question you have just asked. They have sat upright in their desk with a bright face. They are raising their hand and almost saying the

answer already. They want to tell the answer to that question! Such is the attitude that we have, as we personally have seen the unconditional love of God. **It is for anyone to experience!**

As we consider that attitude – we could call it “love speaking” – we should recognize the recipients for whom Christ has died. Whom did he show this love to? Our text had said, *“Christ died for the ungodly.”* And later in this chapter Paul writes, *“just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* Christ has paid the price of sin and guilt for all of the ungodly! He has been “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

This is why Jesus stopped under the tree that Zacchaeus had climbed in our Gospel Reading. Zacchaeus needed a Savior! He was a crooked tax collector, a person labeled the worst of sinners by his own people. But Christ had even died for the sins of Zacchaeus so he could have forgiveness.

Our love is also motivated to speak because we know that this forgiveness is distributed to mankind through the gift of faith. *“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).* Faith is needed in order to receive the blessing of forgiveness that Jesus has won for the world. Therefore, all need to hear love speak. This is why Jesus talked to Zacchaeus in our Gospel lesson today. Even though the people of his day would have been disgusted by Jesus’ conversation with and time spent with a “sinner” like Zacchaeus. **Jesus spoke with him and went to his home, because the message of God’s unconditional love is for anyone to experience.** The alternative would be tragic, continuing on a deliberate path away from God to destruction.

Our love now speaks so that anyone can experience this unconditional love of God. We

never have to wonder whether that person in front of us is one for whom Christ died and rose again. I've seen outreach campaigns that encourage God's people to speak to their "FRAN." FRAN stands for:

- Friends
- Relatives
- Acquaintances
- Neighbors

Acronyms like that can be helpful in identifying who your potential mission field could be as your love speaks (boasts) to others. We could really add more words to this acronym, for don't you want to reach out to all? How about "Enemies?" "Adversaries?" "Rivals?" "Downtrodden?" And more?

- The relative that hates you?
- The neighbor that annoys you?
- The person in the office who isn't like you (or many others, it seems)?
- The sinner you know, who has wrecked their reputation?
- The poor?
- The person who won't give you the time of day when you pass them?
- The person in prison?
- The person who's always asking you to borrow something?
- The gossip?
- The one who always disagrees with you?

Do you look to reach out to them? You do not have to die for their salvation, but **the love that speaks from personal experience reaches out for anyone to experience.**

As we close our service series called "**Love Speaks,**" what a fitting place to end. Love speaks:

- Precisely
- Confidently
- Sacrificially
- Passionately
- With a Focused Heart
- With Urgency
- And... Unconditionally

May God work such love in you. And as we speak, may he work the results that he will, for only the Lord can change hearts of stone into hearts of faith. May the knowledge that he works through the Word and through our witness give us the motivation to let our love speak! Amen.