

4th Sunday in Lent

March 27, 2022

“God’s done it all, for all, and that includes you!” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 4th Sunday in Lent is from the Epistle reading for today, 2 Corinthians 5:18.

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,”

Here ends our text.

What is it that really gets you really enthusiastic in this life? You know, what is it that you really look forward to and anticipate? For some, it might be eating out at a nice restaurant, going to the premier of a movie you want to see, a concert, travelling, or spending time with your family. There are so many things to choose from because God has given us many blessings to enjoy in this life.

For some people, what really gets their heartbeat going is the March Madness that we are in the midst of right now. Only the best college teams qualified for this basketball tournament to find out who is the best. The sweet 16 are whittled down to the elite 8, and then the final four and finally a champion team is crowned. Some people participate in this vicariously by entering a pool to see if you can pick the best team. Bracketology. And in some cases, there is a monetary prize involved.

Again, there’s only one winner in the tournament and one person who takes home the cash prize after all the other’s brackets are broken because of some unforeseen upset from an unknown team like St. Peters.

Well, if that’s not your thing, our Epistle reading truly has what is the most exciting, heart pumping, jump up and down news anyone could ever hope for. In fact, in the verse right before the start of our Epistle reading, verse 13, Paul says that he’s beside himself. He’s going bonkers about this good news! And he can’t keep it to himself. He has to share it! It’s become his life’s work in service to God!

Paul says,

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”

Paul is passionate about the message he has received from God. It changed his life, a complete 180. It made him a new creation. It changed him from a persecutor of God to His biggest ambassador. What is it that has Paul on fire, that he wants to share with a sound mind to the Corinthians and to each of you?

Well, Paul tells us in the very next verse, the start of our Epistle reading for today.

“14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;”

God’s love is making Paul crazy and compelling him to live his life for Christ – not man’s love or any exciting offer from mankind.

For God gives something so great, so amazing, which has convinced Paul completely so that he says, **“we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;”**

The One, Jesus Christ, did die as we in this season of Lent, are hearing anew. And what makes this such an amazing event, unlike the death of any other person in the history of this world, is that He died for all.

Here in this chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians you read the verses of the Bible that most beautifully explain the universal atonement. Christ died for all! There’s not one person that has lived, is living or will yet be born that Christ didn’t die for. Therefore, that includes you!! Paul is speaking about the one thing that gets every Christian excited every day – Christ’s death on behalf of you!!

And to make sure you know how important this is, Paul adds, **“then all died;”**
“if One died for all, then all died;”

What does this mean? Oh, this is the best news! Christ died the death of every single person in this world. He died the eternal death, the eternal punishment, of every single man, woman, and child on this earth. He has done this not just for some privileged few, but for all.

For some, who follow the teachings of John Calvin, this news just can't be true. It's too good to be true. So you know what was developed? TULIP. This is the acronym that stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

Let me digress for just a moment. On these 5 points, only on the first one can Lutherans find agreement. Yes, we are all sinners and totally unable to free ourselves. We are born with original sin and are held captive until God frees us.

Which brings us to the second letter of TULIP. How God frees us. Unconditional Election. Yes, Lutherans believe in predestination. It is a most comforting teaching of the Bible that God elected, before eternity, and in time called to be the firstborn among His brethren. (Romans 8:29-30).

But, and here is the huge difference that Lutherans have with Calvinists and the Reformed church. It's called double predestination.

John Calvin wrote, "whom God passes by he reprobates, and that for no other cause but because he is pleased to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines to his children."

According to Calvin, God predestines some to heaven and predestines some to hell. We answer, of course. NO! Sinful man condemns himself when He rejects God's offer of forgiveness that He won for all! God does not predestine any to hell.

The prodigal son returned home to a father who had planned to forgive him. He looked for the returning of his son while he was still a far off. And the father greeted his lost son with an embrace and kiss of forgiveness. Could the son have rejected such love and gone back to starvation and wanting to eat the pig's food? Of course. He would have been a fool. Some people still reject the love that God offers to all.

And that's why the TULIP teaching continues astray with the letter "I" because grace is not "irresistible". And "L" the atonement is not "limited". The Calvinists have to make grace irresistible so that they can limit the atonement to only some. The lost therefore never received irresistible grace because they were predestined to damnation. And then they have to add in the letter "p", "the perseverance of the saints", that is their "once saved always saved" false teaching to try and harmonize their limited atonement and irresistible grace.

This world has many limits. Understandably, there are term limits, speed limits, and limits on paper towels during this pandemic. Only one team can win the March madness. Only one person gets the prize money from the pool.

But, the most important thing in life can never be limited. It is unlimited atonement. Christ died for all. He paid for all people's sins. That's why you can be confident that He paid for yours!

This is what compels Paul. The love of God for all people compels Paul. Once you remove the universal atonement, you remove the love of God and bring in absolute uncertainty. The result is that a follower of Calvinism has to prove to himself or herself that he is part of the elect by his or her acts of love for God. And that places salvation exactly where it can never be – on oneself!

TULIP drove me to become a pastor of the LCMS. Yes, I was confirmed in the LCMS as a youth. Gave a testimony of my faith at my confirmation. But, when I went to college as a premed student, I was rudely awakened. Yes, this college had a very high placement rate into med school. But this college pushed its reformed teachings on the students. I was naïve to think that all Christians believed the same. And I often found myself defending my trust in the universal atonement against the very professors that I thought believed like me.

If there is no universal atonement, then all things are not from God. That's where doubt enters in. And that uncertainty drives people to despair. As important as helping others in the medical field was to me, helping others spiritually needed to be my life's task.

As our text says,

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,”

The us includes you and me. God has reconciled us and given us the good news to share. God has done it all. Salvation is from God. God has reconciled us to Himself. We did nothing. He was our enemy. And we were His enemies because of our sin. Verse 19, the next verse after our text gives us the explanation.

“19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

In Christ, God reconciled, made peace with, not just some people, but the world! Unlimited atonement! How? By removing what caused our enmity between us – our sin! He did not impute our trespasses to us! He does not count them against us! How? Because God imputed them to His Son, Jesus. God counted them all against Jesus! Jesus died our death!

What does the last verse of our reading say? **“21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

Christ, who knew no sin, never experienced sin, was made sin for us, instead of us. This is the great exchange. Christ took all our sin and we received all His righteousness!

Yes, you can see why Paul is excited about this. He’s compelled by the love of God for all people. He wants all people to receive this great exchange.

“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

Christ has died for all. Receive this great gift. That’s the message of the Bible! That’s our simple message to all people. “Be reconciled to God.”

We don’t know whom God has predestined to heaven. And so we, like Paul, tell the good news of Christ’s salvation to all people! For Christ died for all!

Paul says in our epistle, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

Anyone. There are no limits. God offers the new life in Christ to all. The old life of sin, death, and the devil has passed away. New things of righteousness, life, Christ, heaven are now ours. How? Because of the universal atonement! It all begins with the universal atonement.

And this new life in Christ is a completely different life, Paul says. Your life in Christ is completely different. You are at peace with God. You’ve been reconciled. You live with the sure hope of eternal life.

And not only that, but your world view has changed completely. Paul says,

“He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

We no longer live for ourselves, but for God! This means that we see the world as God sees it - a mission field of lost people who need His love. Paul says,

“Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.”

We regard no one according to the flesh. We don't put any limits on who can be saved according to race, social standing, language, you name it. Saul once looked down on Jesus and all His followers as He persecuted them. But no more. Saul was converted to Paul and was shown the light of Jesus' love for all people! This is what compels him and makes him beside himself.

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation”

God has done all things to reconcile mankind in Jesus. And He has done all things to get the word out by giving us the ministry of reconciliation. Who has God given this to? To Paul, to the apostles, yes! To us? Yes! For we have been made new also. Each of us is part of the ministry of reconciliation, by taking the word of reconciliation to the lost.

Each of us is an ambassador, a representative of God, His feet, His hands, His word, His embrace, His reconciliation. Yes, you get to welcome the lost prodigal son back to God with the good news of Jesus' forgiveness for all! And if that doesn't make you besides yourself, like Paul, just think remember one thing again and again. Christ, the One, died for all, and then, all died. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)