

The Love of Christ Compels Us

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (Bringing Mission into Focus - Reach Out)

Love is a very compelling reason to do a lot of things. A husband takes his wife out for dinner or buys her flowers because he loves her. A wife gives her husband a present because she loves him. A child will draw a picture for mom and dad because he loves them. Someone will give his or her friend a hand when asked (or maybe even without being asked) because of love. Love is indeed a very compelling reason to do a lot of things, but how reliable is our love? How motivating is our love? Sometimes it is very reliable and very motivating. Yet when put to the test, our love is frail. It is flawed and imperfect. It is sometimes selective in who and how love is shown. It is sometimes conditional. It often has a tendency to think about how we benefit. Our love isn't a perfectly reliable and motivating force.

Imagine if it was our love that compelled, motivated, and drove us to reach out into the world around us proclaiming God's love for the world in Christ? What would that look like? Understanding how we so often love people, reaching out would be filled with all that our love is like - inconsistent, selective, conditional, and self-serving in some way. Thankfully, our love is not that motivating force which compels us to reach out. Our love is a response to God's love who loved us first. It's right there on the front wall: We love him because he first loved us. It isn't our love that compels us, pushes us, motivates us to reach out. If that were the case that it would be all about us. It is, as the Apostle Paul tells us, the love of Christ which compels us as a church, an assembly of God's people, to reach out into the world around us. It is all about Jesus and his love. Yet in order for the love of Christ to compel us to do anything, we have to go back and make sure we are rejoicing in what his love means for us personally so his love is that compelling force behind our reaching into the world. **"For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. And 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."** (vs. 14-15)

"One died for all." The world, you and I, deserved to endure the penalty and punishment for every sin ever committed. Instead because of his perfect, unconditional, and self-sacrificing love for sinful mankind, Jesus went to the cross and died. He endured the sins of the whole world along with the penalty all sins deserve. "One died for all; therefore all died." That's exactly what Christ's love for the world led him to do. Jesus died in our place so that we might live. That's why we love him because he first loved us.

And because Jesus died for all, those who live trusting in what his death has given to them, the living live for him. The love that had been driven by the sinful nature which was so often focused inward, has a new motivational source - the love of Christ. We no longer live for ourselves but for him who loved us, died for us, and was raised to life for us. Compelled by the love of Christ we begin to see people and love them not according to our sinful flesh, but how Jesus would have us see them and love them. **"As 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!"** (vs. 16-17)

To regard people "according to the flesh" is to see them from our own sinful nature's perspective. When evaluating someone from that perspective, you take into consideration things like social, political, and financial standing, their education, age, health, lifestyle, gender, and nationality. When we see people from the perspective of our sinful nature, the focus is not what Jesus sees and feels. It's what we see and how we feel. We aren't seeing them as Jesus saw us - someone whom he loves, for whom he has died, and to whom he needed him to reach out. That affects not just who and how we reach out to, but also what love is motivating the reaching out. It isn't Christ's love.

In Christ we are made new. We have forgiveness. The old has passed away and the new has come. We don't want to live the old way of our sinful nature, but the new life we have in Jesus. So the love of Christ who loved us first compels us to change how we view people seeing them in a new perspective - through the eyes of Jesus. When you view people through the eyes of Jesus, what is it that you see? Do you see someone who Jesus loves? Do you see someone for whom Jesus died? Do you see someone who needs to know his saving love for them so that they might live? Do you see yourself? It is his love for us which compels us to zealously and eagerly reach out with reconciliation. **“And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That 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.” (vs. 18-19)**

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines "reconcile" as "to restore to friendship or harmony" or "to settle or resolve differences". Mankind needed to be reconciled to God. You and I included. Sin sets people at odds with God. It makes them his enemies. Man cannot do the reconciling himself. God in his love had to be the cause of reconciliation, that state of being restored to harmony. God acted to reconcile us to himself and resolve our differences caused by our sins through Jesus taking away what set us at odds with God. With sins forgiven, they are no longer counted against us. Now he has placed that work of reaching out in our care. He has entrusted you and I with that eternally important message of reconciliation that comes only through Jesus. Compelled by the love of Christ every one of us now serves as an ambassador for Christ. **“Therefore, 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. God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (vs. 20-21)**

An ambassador has an important job. He or she represents their country, speaks for their country on certain matters, and upholds the interests of their country in all their dealings. It's an honor, privilege, and a very important task to be entrusted with that role of an ambassador. Compelled by the love of Christ, we serve as ambassadors of Christ who speak as his mouthpiece in the world. We speak of everyone's need for reconciliation because of the sin they are born in and the sins they commit. We speak of how God brought about that needed reconciliation. Through you and I, an appeal is being made through us with a simple message: Be reconciled to God through Christ as a great exchange.

What a beautiful exchange that is! Jesus did not know sin in the sense that we know sin. People know sin by doing it and experiencing its consequences. Yet in this great exchange God made him who did not know sin and did not have sin, to be sin. Jesus took the sins of the world upon himself, every last one of them. With the sins of the world placed on Jesus, the sinner you and I receives Jesus' perfect righteousness and holiness. The sinner is made right before God through Jesus. The sins that were there are no longer there and God sees the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus. That's the Great Exchange. That's how sinners are reconciled to God through Jesus. That's the appeal Jesus is making through you and I as his ambassadors. Joining together in that shared service as a gathering of people reconciled to God through Jesus, we are compelled by the same love of Christ to reach out with reconciliation.

Think of all the ways that in some way the people of this congregation celebrating 150 years joins together to reach out as faithful ambassadors into the world around us. We reach out in our own individual lives to the people that we know and those we meet sharing with the message of reconciliation and what the love of Christ has done for them. As a church, we reach out through our website, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram pages streaming worship services, posting devotional thoughts, sharing what our congregation is doing, and letting people know what we are all about - Jesus. We reach out through our Christian Day school offering a place for children to know what the love of Jesus has done for them. We reach out by hosting community activities like Toddler Open Gym, Summer

Celebration, Vacation Bible School, the Easter Egg Hunt, and the Thanks and Giving Festival. We reach out by participating in activities like the Christmas parade or the Six Feet Trick or Treat. Through all of these, whether they are done in our own personal life sharing and inviting or jointly working together, we are reaching out as his ambassadors right here in Elkhorn.

“We love him because he first loved us.” We have those words up in front of our church. We see them every time we come in here. We certainly love him because of his great love for us. Yet it is his perfect love that compels us as a church, an assembly of God’s people, to see people as Jesus sees them and then reach out to them in any way we can so that many more in our community might know what we know and hold so dear in our own hearts. For 150 years, reaching out is what First Lutheran has been doing right here in Elkhorn, Wisconsin. That is what we will continue to do humbly serving as ambassadors of our Savior. My friends, brothers and sister in Christ, we have something amazing to share - the love of Jesus and his forgiveness that is for everyone. Compelled by Christ’s love, let’s keep reaching out and sharing it together! Amen



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