

LENTEN SERMON 3

TEXT: LUKE 24: 44-49

THEME: LOVE THAT COMES IN MANY WAYS

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, **46** and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, **47** and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things. **49** And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

In the name of Jesus:

There was a man who loved a woman. She had his whole heart. Her birthday came, and he decided that he really wanted her to know how special she was to him and how much he loved her. As she sat at work that day, a deliveryman came with a bouquet of flowers and a note that read, “Happy birthday! I love you!” He took her for lunch that day to her favorite restaurant, and a little card on the table read, “Happy birthday! I love you!” At the end of the meal, he gave her a gift to unwrap: jewelry. He looked her in the eye and said, “Happy birthday. I love you.” Coming out of the restaurant, she looked up, and there was a low-flying airplane pulling a banner, and sure enough, it read, “Happy birthday! I love you!” And after work that day, when she got home and was sitting and thinking what a nice day it had been, and how over-the-top her

beloved had been with everything, the doorbell rang, she opened it, and there stood three people, who started singing. It was a singing telegram, expressing the man's love for her. We may be amazed that someone could love another person so much, but the fact of the matter is, God loves you more.

In our Lenten sermons this year, we are focusing on the enormity of God's mercy for us in Christ, and taking time to trace the great dimensions of his love. Last week the sermon's theme was "Love That Spares No Cost," and we reflected on the staggering cost that God was willing to pay for our good—the precious blood of Christ. This week, our theme is this: God's love comes to us in many ways.

In our text for today, Jesus repeats to his disciples again this central truth: that his coming into the world, that his suffering, and dying, and rising again from the dead, has all been toward this end: the forgiveness of sins. Jesus now is sending his disciples out into the world to call people to repent of their sins and to proclaim the forgiveness of their sins in his name.

Why is the forgiveness of sins so important? Without the forgiveness of our sins, we are separated from God, we stand as God's enemies, God doesn't look upon us with His favor, and every day of our lives we are storing up wrath for ourselves before God. As the epistle of James puts it, we are "fattening ourselves in the day of slaughter." Without forgiveness, we live our

lives waiting for the other shoe to drop, waiting upon God to lower the boom and drop the hammer, to punish us for our sins. And we live our lives waiting for the time when we will be damned in eternity for our sins. Not a great life to look forward to, now, is it?

But the Good News is that we are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. And because we are forgiven, God now looks upon us with favor and love. Because we are forgiven we are now friends with God and God treats us as His dear children. And we can know with confidence that, on the day of judgment, there will be no wrath, no punishment, but rather a joyful embrace in the arms of our loving God. That is why God forgives us, so that He can show us and shower us with His love. And this is given to us, not because we have done anything or have deserved it, it is given to us because God loves us in Jesus. For the Bible says: "Thus it is written, [Jesus said to his disciples,] that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

God forgives you, then places forgiveness in your hands so that you can give it and spread it and share it with others. This forgiveness is not just given to us one time in our life, it is given to us each and everyday of our lives. Just as the Catechism says: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength

believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way, he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, he daily and richly forgives me all my sins, and the sins of all believers." Note that last line: "In this Christian Church, God daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers." Daily. Yes, every day God extends his forgiveness. Just as he teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," so also he teaches us to pray, "And forgive us our trespasses." We need forgiveness, and God grants us forgiveness, just as continually as we need food, that is, daily! "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" [Lam 3:22–23]. God forgives us daily, every day.

But why do we say in the catechism that God forgives us richly? "In this Christian Church he daily and richly forgives me all my sins." Well, one way to think about it is to consider the rich multitude of ways that God brings his forgiveness into my life. I like the way our Lutheran Confessions puts it: "The Gospel of forgiveness in Christ gives us help against sin "in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world . . .

second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.” [SA III:4; Kolb-Wengert translation].

God loves you so much that he has won for you and he gives to you the greatest gift a sinner could receive: full and free forgiveness, in Jesus’s name. And God loves you so extravagantly that he gives you this greatest gift in numerous ways, in the spoken Word, in Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper, in the Absolution or public forgiveness of your sins, and also in the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters in Christ.

This forgiveness of sins comes not just from the pastor’s lips, but also from the lips of others, God himself is at work, beating back the sinful unbelief and stubborn doubts of our hearts. Through the lips of a friend, a sibling, a parent, a child, a neighbor, even there God testifies to and displays his love for us.

This is why it is so important to come to church and worship physically together in one place. Worship was not meant to be on line in the privacy of one’s home, it is meant to be public, in that gathering of brothers and sisters together in one place on a Sunday, to receive God’s forgiveness and to share it in the physical relationships we have with one another in the congregation.

God shares His forgiveness with you not just in one way, but in many ways, pling His love in our lives, heaping upon us the assurance that you are forgiven and loved by God in Jesus.

God loves you, dear friends, with an enormous love. And in the extravagance of his love, and in his great concern that you be constantly certain and sure of it, he extends heavenly forgiveness to you in these many ways. It's like he wants to be sure you keep warm, and so he gives you not one coat, or two coats, but several coats. "Who needs four or five coats?" we might say. "That's ridiculous!" But God knows that sometimes the world can be very, very cold. And he wants you to remain always in the warm security of his love. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name

Amen