

## Foundation of Reconciliation

Romans 5:6-11

Lent 1, March 13, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

For what sort of a person would you give your life?

I think that everyone in this room would give their life for their children, if you have children. Even those of you who do not have children can at least imagine that if you had children, you would give your life to save their life.

Let me then ask you: would you give your life for your spouse? Here there may be some hesitation. Some of you would immediately give your life to save the life of your spouse, but some of you would not. You desire to be free from your spouse. You would not give your life for your spouse. This is largely because of how your spouse has treated you.

Would you give your life for your parents?

Would you give your life for one of your friends? In considering whether or not I would give my life for one of my friends, it would depend on which friend I am considering dying to save. Is this a close friend? Is this a valuable friend? Is this person merely an acquaintance? And when I consider my friends I want to make sure that the friend for whom I am giving my life to save them is worthy of being saved. I don't want to give my life for someone who is going to go on and do terrible things. It would be better if he died instead of me. I would want to know whether or not the friend for whom I am giving my life is going to go on and do good things for others. That way I know that I gave my life for a worthy cause. I know that my life benefits others through the person for whom I gave my life. When it comes to my friends whether or not I give my life depends on whether or not they are worthy.

A number of years ago there was a remake of Battlestar Galactica. I watched it. I watched it mainly because I watched the original Battlestar Galactica when I was a kid and also because in the remake the villains, the Cylons, kept quoting the Bible, while the good guys, the humans, kept quoting ancient Greek gods. It had a religious overtone and dealt with existential issues that I found compelling.

In the pilot episode the Cylons conquer Caprica and all of the humans need to evacuate the planet. If they do not evacuate, the Cylons will kill them. The humans therefore flee to the ships that they are going to use to evacuate. The problem is that there are not enough ships to evacuate everyone. Some people are going to have to stay on Caprica and die. One of the soldiers organizing the evacuation spots a man whom he knows to be a brilliant scientist. While this brilliant scientist turns out to be a villain, the soldier helping with the evacuation does not know that. He thinks that this scientist has the knowledge to increase humanity's odds of survival. So the soldier gives up his own place on the evacuation ships so that this scientist may have his place. The soldier gave his life to save a scientist that the soldier believed would help save humanity. The soldier gave up his life for someone that the soldier thought was worthy. That is how it is with humans. We want to know that the cause or the person for whom we lay down our lives is worthy. After all it is my life.

Young people join the military at least in part for altruistic reasons. They believe in America and they are willing to lay down their lives to defend her. If a young person does not believe in America and its promise, then a young person will not enlist. They are unwilling to lay down their lives for this cause. Whether or not we lay down our lives depends on whether or not we think the person or the cause for which we are laying down our lives is worthy. If we think they are unworthy, then we will not lay down our lives for them. In the moment when we are required to lay down our lives we will hesitate long enough for them to die and for us to live, but if we are convinced that they are worthy of our lives then we will lay it down willingly. This is how the love of humans operates. At least it is how it operates when we stop to think about questions like, "For whom would I die?"

Now God's ways are not our ways. If the doctrine of sin teaches us anything it teaches us that God is different than we are. As God Himself puts it through Isaiah, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are My ways than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." Well if the ways and thoughts of God are higher than our ways and thoughts as much as the highest quasar is above the earth, then the love of God is also higher than our love. So when God is answering the question for whom would He die, He answers it by saying that He would die for His enemies. He does not consider whether or not the people for whom He is dying are worthy of Him, the almighty creator God, laying down His life for them. His love is different.

The death of Christ therefore not only reveals to us the great love of God, it also reveals to us that we are His enemies. Christ died for the ungodly. If you confess that Christ died for you, then you are confessing that you are ungodly. But that conclusion is not something that you and I could have come to on our own. In the whole consideration of the worth of someone for whom we would give our lives, we assume that our lives are worthy of such consideration. We assume that we are good people and we do not want to give our lives for someone who is bad. That assumption comes from our sin condition. It is the sin condition itself that blinds us to how bad our sin condition is. If we faced the whole of our sin condition, it would be overwhelming.

We cannot get outside of ourselves and look at ourselves while we are sinning. We cannot see the thoughts in other people's hearts as we sin against them and they experience the pain of our actions against them. We cannot hear the tone of our own voice when we voice unrighteous anger. We cannot see the expression on our face when we engage in evil lust or unrighteous wrath or selfish ambition. Because we cannot see that, we cannot see how bad we are. The death of Christ must reveal it to us and reveal it to us Christ does.

When God offers His life for us we cannot possibly be worthy of it. If we were worthy of having Christ die for us, then God's thoughts would be like our thoughts. His ways would be like our ways. But God's thoughts are not like our thoughts. His ways are not like our ways. When He offers His life, He offers His life for the ungodly. Since He offers His life for you, you are ungodly. Since you are ungodly you are His enemies.

What do you do with an enemy?

When an intruder is in your home and threatening the lives of your children, he has made himself your enemy. What do you do with your enemies? Do you not kill him? When you are serving in the military and the jihadists are coming over the hill to murder you and your buddies serving with you, they have made themselves your enemy. What do you do with an enemy? Do you not kill him?

What if it is not a life or death situation? Then you simply avoid your enemy. You do not go to the places where he goes. You do not associate with the people with whom he associates. You do not have business dealings with him. That is what you do with your enemy. You do not die for him.

Because we are ungodly, God is livid with our sin and our sins. He has wrath against them. He would not be much of a god if He did not have wrath against sin. Only a wimpy God would allow His creations to get away with things contrary to His will. God is not a wimp. He is righteous and holy. Therefore He is not going to allow you or anybody to get away with sin or sins. If He does, He is not God. But then we are all ungodly and so God being God does not allow any of us to get away with any of it. He has wrath against all of us. His wrath is being revealed against all godlessness and unrighteousness. If He has wrath against us, then we have become His enemies. We have made ourselves His enemies by falling into sin. Our sin blinds us to the fact that we are enemies of God. The death of the Christ reveals that we are His enemies, because God's love is higher than ours. He would love His enemies. And so while we were still His enemies Christ died for us.

What should God have done with His enemies? He should have killed us all. That is what you do with your enemies. He should have killed us all everlastingly in hell. Instead He demonstrates that His love is higher than our love as high as the heavens are above the earth in that while we were still His enemies Christ died for us.

The death of Christ propitiates God's wrath.

Without the book of Leviticus, the death of Christ makes no sense. Without the book of Leviticus the New Testament proclamation that Christ's death propitiates God's wrath comes right out of nowhere. But God prepared us for the death of Christ through the book of Leviticus. What Leviticus teaches in no uncertain terms is that sin requires the shedding of blood to propitiate God's wrath. In other words when the animal dies in place of the sinner who offers the animal, the wrath of God is soothed so that God is no longer angry with that worshipper. If there is anything else the book of Leviticus teaches us, it is that such propitiation is beyond the ability of simple animal sacrifices to bring about. After years of making such sacrifices the people of Israel confess through the Psalms and the Prophets that this is not enough. Thus the Christ came. He suffered in our place. He shed His blood and atoned for our sin and our sins. He thus propitiated God's wrath. He soothed God's wrath. And if God is no longer angry with you because of the death of Christ, then you are no longer His enemy. If you are no longer His enemy, you are reconciled to God. You are reconciled to God through the death of Christ.

If you are going to boast about anything between you and God, you have only this to boast about: His great love for you shown to you when He reconciled you to Himself through Christ Jesus.

It is upon the basis of this reconciliation to God and how much it cost God to bring it about, that all other reconciliation is based.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Chancel Drama:

Four characters:

Father

Mother

Baby

Dangerous Person

Baby wanders about toward various dangers represented by various objects or pictures. The parents chase the baby around and protect it from the dangers that he cannot see. In the same way we cannot see the danger that we are in and yet God protects us from it by the death of His Son.

Dangers include:

A knife

A hot pan on a stove

A dangerous person

Or whatever else the youth come up with.