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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 10, 2019
1st Sunday in Lent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-7 Pasion: Upper Room II
Hymns: 363; 245; 145; 409:1 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:9-11

⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Why? --

When bad things happen in this world people will invariably ask "Why?" "Why did this happen?" They may even go so far as to question God's love in directing world events, asking "If there is a loving God why would He allow such pain in the world? Or to befall my loved one?" Yes, they question God's love, or His power to control evil, or even beyond that the very existence of God in heaven.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent and our Sunday Lenten meditations we shall be considering some of the whys and wherefores of the Sufferings and Death of Christ as the Apostle John reveals this gospel truth in his first epistle. And yes, some people even question why God would allow such a horror to befall Jesus if God is kind and loving.

That takes us to the heart of the matter. What is revealed for us in Christ's Sufferings and Death is in fact:

THEME: The Love of God Toward Us.

How does one see the love of God in this world? One well might answer in many ways. He makes His sun shine on the evil as well as on the good. Our lives are filled with His many blessings in house and home, spouse and children. And that list of blessings could continue for a very long time. However, none of these things reveal the immense greatness of God's love, the true extent of His loving care for us all as much as this one marvel of grace:

I. In the Greatness of His Love God Sent His Son.

1 John 4:9 "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

To say that God's love was manifested by this, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world, we need to understand the real history of the world, and why this was even necessary.

The Apostle Paul teaches us the basic truth that came out of the fall into sin. "*Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*" (Romans 5:12). Sin brought death into the world, and the impact of the sin of Adam was not limited to Adam, but spread like a dreaded genetic disease. Because of Adam's sin, all men have sinned, and so death has passed upon all men. OK, so we die.

Everyone knows that everything eventually dies. The world fights death to no avail. The world attempts to accept death as natural, but it wasn't and isn't the way God designed His creation. Death is the enemy. Death comes tragically upon all; not just physical death but spiritual death which makes it impossible for anyone to be pure and holy and truly righteous before God, not on their own by their merit. Death leads to death. Spiritual death, unless it is defeated, will end with eternal death, that eternal separation from God in hell.

This is a desperate set of circumstances and we must not allow the world to convince us otherwise. Being nice doesn't defeat death. Being beautiful doesn't defeat death. Man with all the advances of science, man with all the genius of philosophy cannot defeat death or wish it away. And yet since it was by man that death came into the world it is by Man that it must be defeated.

This would require an unparalleled act of kindness. This act of kindness would be unparalleled in more than one way. It would be unparalleled because of the nature of the act of kindness, that the Divine, the only begotten Son of God, would take upon Himself our human nature. The Divine would not only be clothed by human flesh and blood, but would be fully human, and yet still be divine. He would humble Himself submitting the law, fulfilling the law and thereby establishing the full and perfect righteousness of the law. He would humble Himself and be obedient to the Father's will to defeat death as only He could defeat death, by laying down His life and then taking it up again. (John 10:18) He for whom death was totally foreign and undeserved would pass through death and the grave that others might have the blessing of eternal life.

This act of kindness would be unparalleled because of the unworthy nature of the recipients of this act of kindness. Again we read in Paul's epistle to the Romans; *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for*

the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
(Romans 5:6-8)

People still question the extent of God's love for us almost every time someone is in pain, or suffering from a disease, or when other people do bad things. NO, they won't come to the conclusion that people are by nature ugly and evil and the cause of the corruption we see in this world. They would rather question the gracious nature of a loving God. They fail to comprehend the marvel of the gospel that we are focusing on during this season of Lent. God's love, the immense proportions of God's love for this fallen world is truly revealed in this truth, "*that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*" (v. 9)

Death is defeated and we have been given the gift of life, spiritual life beginning right here and now by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, with this life continuing on into an eternal life which is reserved for us in heaven.

What in this world would ever move God to do this? God's motivation is found --

**II. In His Love for Us, not ours for God.
His Love Is the Cause of our Salvation.**

1 John 4:10 "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

We were just reminded by the words of Paul to the Romans that God loved us while we were still sinners, but does that mean that we didn't already love God? Many in this world claim to love God, even as they claim that there is a core of truth and love and goodness within the heart of everyman. That is nothing more than self-deception.

The truth is, *“the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

(Romans 8:7-8) Enmity is not love. It is the opposite of love. Enmity is deep seated animosity, a despising of God, and that is what lies within the heart of man. It opposes God and His holy will. Many consider themselves to be the masters of their own fate and the ones who ought to determine what is right and good for their own lives. That my friend is nothing short of rebellion. So the cause for God sending His Son into the world is not going to be found within us or any love that we have in our hearts toward God, or for that matter toward anyone else.

In spite of who and what we are, not because of who and what we are, God loved us. This is the Agape love, the pure love, the love of action, the love that carries on even without the appropriate loving response. Just how far would the Son of God go in loving this sinful world? He would give Himself to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation is a big word, but it is a word worth knowing, like righteousness and justification. So take a moment to appreciate the rich grace and truth revealed for you in knowing that Jesus is the propitiation for your sins. Propitiation is a satisfying payment. That means that it meets the debt and satisfies the debt of our sin; but it is more than that. Propitiation also includes the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice to remove God's wrath. Not only is the debt of our sin paid, but we are assured that God's wrath is assuaged. God isn't mad at you anymore or ever again! Knowing propitiation is established by Jesus' suffering and death brings full meaning to such passages as Romans 8:1 which assures us: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* and the precious words that end that chapter of Romans: *“I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38)

My friends in Christ that is a love that is powerful enough not only to get us through all the tribulations of this life, but to change cold and stony hearts into hearts of flesh.

III. His Love for Us Moves Us to Love One Another.

1 John 4:11 “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

When we by faith come to an appreciation for this great love of God in Christ it takes possession of our hearts. It cannot leave us unchanged. Life can no longer be about me, and how **I feel** or what **I** want, or what **I** can get out of life in pleasure or treasure. It becomes being about serving God and my neighbor. What I am saying is that we don't do good because that will make me feel good about myself. Without doubt it is laudable to do good to make this world a better place, or to make our community a nicer place with a better quality of life for everyone. That is laudable, but that is not the love that we are being encouraged to live in these words of our text. This is agape love, not “fileo” love, which is community love or friendship love. It is not “storge” love, which is familial love. It is Agape love, that pure love of action that simply does because another needs. John is telling us that especially within the Church this love rules. As Christ has loved us with this pure and sacrificial love, so let us also love one another, *“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”* (Ephesians 4:32)

This is the power of God's love within you. The Lord lays before us all sorts of opportunities to do good, to be kind, to live in gratitude for Christ, demonstrating the love that is truly only learned from Him. What a rich blessing this is that we possess in our relationship with one another. And oh yes, of course, this is a love that spills over to those who are in the world around us. They will see Christ's love in the way we care for one another, and they will

experience Christ's love for themselves in the way we behave among them.

In this help us our loving Father in heaven.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.