

Pentecost 3 / June 18, 2023

Romans 5:8

“God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God Shows His love for us: While we sinners Christ died for us.

The 43rd Sonnet written by Elizabeth Barret Browning begins, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach.” That’s how much she loved someone special to her heart. How much does God love us? Can we possibly count the ways? How deeply does God love us? Far deeper than any human being can love another. God is the infinite Being. The greatest human love is like a candle to the sun, in comparison to His love. Love is a common theme in poetry. It’s easy to express love in words, but to be true, love must be expressed in actions. Actions speak louder than words. God expresses His love in actions each day in many ways, miraculous when you stop to consider them; but so common place that they are taken for granted and hardly noticed, until they are removed.

God expresses His love in the gift of life. We experience His love with every breath we take and with every beat of our hearts. God shows His love by providing for our physical needs. The psalmist sang, “You cause grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate that he may bring forth food from the earth; wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.” God does this for all people, whether they know and acknowledge Him, or curse and hate Him. Paul said to the pagan Gentiles at Lystra, even though you have not known or acknowledged Him, “He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

God blesses us with life through our parents, emotional support through our families and the companionship of our friends and communities. Consider all the people God has brought into your life and the many blessings you received through your friendships with them. Consider the age in which we live and the technologies available to us, made possible by God’s gift of intellect. Technologies that would have been considered miraculous a mere two centuries ago. God loves us more than words can tell. He puts His love into action every day through the creation.

God expresses His love for us and all human beings in many ways, but He gives the greatest expression of love for us, by giving His eternally begotten Son to live as one of us and to die for us. He did this that we would be established with Him in a relationship of love and peace. In Jesus, God clothed Himself with our humanity and took on human flesh. How incredible that the Creator would lower Himself to the level of His creature! Some people speculate that this is what provoked Satan and his company to anger. Perceiving God would do something like this they rebelled, outraged that God would join Himself to weak humans made from dirt, rather than to glorious angelic beings like themselves.

That’s pure speculation, but it is truly remarkable that in Jesus, God joined Himself to our humanity and lived among us in this world of sin and death. What is more remarkable is His reason for doing this: That He might bear the wrath our sin deserved, take our guilt away and bring us into relationship with Him as children dearly loved. The poets sing odes to love saying, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” Human love is a great gift of God. Human beings express love in many ways, in words and actions, all of which should be received with gratitude and celebrated in song. But God expresses His love in the most superlative way, by giving Christ to live and die for us. In this love we most truly rejoice!

God gave Jesus. because He loves us. We don’t know what motivated Satan and his angels to turn from God, but he vented his anger on the humans God made in His image. Satan planted the seed of doubt in the human heart which germinated, produced the weed of sin and a harvest death. The humans created from dirt, whom God exalted above the angels to bear His image, turned from Him in distrust. They shattered their relationship with Him, with creation and with each other. Like a potter working with clay, God formed the man from the earth and formed the woman from the man. If a potter found a defect in the clay, he would likely choose to destroy it and start over again. God could have destroyed His human creature and started again. Instead, God chose to love human beings, despite our rebellion and sin. He continued to show kindness to His human creation. He determined to make a new beginning. Not by destroying and starting again. Instead He redeemed His clay creatures and began reforming His image in us, by sending His Son to redeem us from the curse of sin and set us free from the condemnation of death.

Paul observes that death reigned over human beings from Adam to Moses. Death has reigned over human beings since the sin of the first people. Paul makes this observation to point out the connection between sin and death. Sin is the cause of death, because sin has broken the relationship between God and humanity. The law was given to reveal sin as the cause of death. Paul writes, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." Where there is no law there is no connection between sin and death. The law reveals sin as the greatest spiritual poison. Sin has poisoned the human spirit, so that our thoughts, inclinations and actions are naturally and constantly hostile to God. Because of the poison of sin, we are by nature enemies of God.

The word Paul used for enemies is the word the Greeks used for personal enemies. Greeks had lots of enemies and different words for each type. The law was given to Moses to make sin known as the cause of death, so that people would see their sin and see their need for God to be our Saviour. But if we were His personal enemies, why would God want to be our Saviour? Would you want to be the saviour of your enemies? Would you be the saviour of people who hate you and consider you their enemy? Of course not, but this is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God shows His infinite, incomprehensible love for us in this: That while we were unconverted, unconvinced and in every way unlovable, Christ died for our forgiveness.

Christ died for our forgiveness that through faith in Him as our God and Saviour, we would be pardoned from the guilt of our sins and saved from God's wrath, which is first expressed in physical death and expressed ultimately in eternal death. Only God could do this for us! We were and are, powerless to bring ourselves to God. The law was not given so we could work our way to God. The law shows our sin and powerlessness to initiate relationship with God. The law shows we need God to be our Saviour. Motivated by His powerful love, God became our Saviour. He comes to us in Christ Jesus, so that through the forgiveness of His cross, we will be drawn to Him in faith, receive forgiveness and enter into relationship with Him as our God and Saviour. Christ died so that through the forgiveness of His cross, received by faith in His name, we would be restored to a good relationship with our Creator. Christ died that the image of God's love shattered by sin, would begin to be made new in the hearts of those who believe.

God comes to us today through the power of His word to open our hearts to believe. His words are not just words. They are full of Spirit and life. His word opens our hearts to faith. Through the word and by the working of His Holy Spirit, He fills our hearts with His grace in forgiveness. He establishes us in relationship with Him and nurtures our faith, until faith passes into sight and we enter into the fulness of relationship in our share of Christ's resurrection at the dawn of eternal life.

How does God love us? We can only begin to count the ways. God loves us by forgiving our sins and forgetting our transgressions. God loves us by giving His eternal Son to share our humanity and bear our sins, so that through the grace of forgiveness we would receive reconciliation with Him as children. God who loves us so deeply and dearly, keep us in His grace until we experience the fullness of His love in our share of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In His name. Amen.