

"Appealing"

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

May each one of you learn to ever more fully recognize and appreciate the love that your God has for you, and thrill each day to know Jesus Christ as your one and only Savior from eternal death in hell. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Appealing. It would be interesting to be able to hear the first thought that popped into your head when you heard that word just now. Phonetically it could be the thing that you take off the outside of a banana. My guess is that the thought that first came to mind was a positive image. Most probably hear the word as an adjective that describes something attractive or pleasing.

Our text for this morning uses the word in yet another way – as a verb – and the context of that use of the word appealing is remarkable. These are the gems of God's Word that we tend to miss when we lightly skip across the surface. We resist that temptation this morning by looking more carefully at the profound truths presented in our text for this morning.

There are certain portions of Scripture that are simply breathtaking in their very majesty, grandeur, and significance. Such splendor is clearly evident this morning in the Word of God found recorded in Paul's Second Letter to the Church in Corinth, the Fifth Chapter:

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶ ¶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

So far our text. In thanks to our Lord for this gift of his Word, and in humble acknowledgement of its grandeur and majesty, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

"Appealing" is for the most part an upbeat word, isn't it? For most it elicits images that are positive and desirable – things that you like the instant you see or hear them. Think of a secluded, blue-water, white sand beach, a well-tuned and well-played violin or cello, a well-decorated and tastefully coordinated living room. There are some things in life that nearly everyone finds instantly and almost universally *appealing*.

How the landscape tilts when you think of the word as a verb instead of an adjective. While everyone wants to be surrounded by things that are appealing, I'm not sure anyone wants to find himself in the position where he has to do the appealing. *Appealing*, when used that way, conjures up not pleasant images of beauty and tranquility but of deprivation and need, maybe even *desperation*. *"The jury found me guilty, but I am appealing."* *"I am going to be appealing to the governor for a stay of execution."* Again, if you find yourself having to do the appealing, you are probably in a bad spot.

That said, did you catch who in our text was doing the appealing? Listen to the words again: ***Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***

Aren't those words just absolutely startling when you stop to consider them? What a profound thought that *God* could or would ever make an appeal to anyone for anything. Those who appeal are pretty much always in a position of weakness; they are subject to the whims or decisions of another (children to parents, defendants to judges, employees to employers, etc.) Now plug God into that equation and it makes no sense whatsoever.

And there you have the gospel, perfectly laid out. There you have the love of God on full display.

Understand that verbal inspiration plays a significant role here, doesn't it. How? Because only when you are assured that these words are coming not from the mind of a man (the Apostle Paul) but from God himself, can you have any confidence that the incredible concept conveyed by these words represents reality. In other words, if it were just Paul saying something like, *"It's almost as though God is appealing*

to you..." it would be one thing. But when we recognize and accept the fact that God himself verbally inspired Paul to write these exact words, then we can *and should* arrive at solid conclusions based on them.

Go back then to the thought expressed by these words – words that God himself wanted Paul to write – and the message is, again, truly remarkable: *God is appealing to unbelieving mankind.*

If it is true that the one who appeals is almost universally subject to the one who is appealed to, why would the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, ever refer to himself as the one who is "appealing" to his sinful, fallen creation? The only answer can be purest, divine love – God appealing to man not for his own benefit but for man's. For *ours*.

God obviously knows full well that heaven and hell are realities. He knows that every human soul *will* spend eternity in one place or the other. Sinful, flighty human beings tend to lose sight of that reality. We get so preoccupied by the temporal that we lose track of the reality (and inevitability) of the eternal. As Christians we know what's coming, but our preoccupation causes us to fail to apply that truth and act accordingly day-to-day and moment-by-moment.

Think of it this way. If you really believed that Christ was coming tomorrow, or next week, what would you do differently? Clearly our focus and activities would shift dramatically. We would reach out to unbelieving friends and family not "someday" but *immediately*. Right now.

Oh but that's not fair. We don't and can't know when Christ is going to return, so we have to keep earning our daily bread. In fact the Apostle Paul himself chided the Thessalonians for quitting their jobs and simply waiting around for the Lord to return.

Yes and no. Paul condemned them for quitting their jobs and sitting around idly; he did not condemn them for focusing their lives on the Lord's return. His message was *"Work while you wait. Look to the Lord's return, but do what he told you to do while you wait."*

The very thought presented in our text of God appealing to mankind is truly remarkable. It does not teach us that man has the power to "accept Christ," but it does teach us that we have the terrifying power to reject. It also warns that we have the power to throw away what we even now possess.

Again, what a powerful demonstration of the love that God has for each one of us. God will obviously spend all eternity in heaven. The only question that remains is whether or not an individual human being will. For that to happen, a human being – in the words of our text – needs to be **"reconciled to God."**

But if that's not a *decision* that we can make, then why do these verbally inspired words from Paul speak of God's appeal that we be reconciled?

Note first of all the passive **"be reconciled."** Paul did not say, *"Reconcile yourselves to God."* He said, **"be reconciled."** Our text then clears up any doubt with these words: **"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself."** As an act of pure love, God sent his Son to pay what we owed. He tore down the barrier of sin that we had erected. His message is then: *"The wall that prevented you from accessing heaven has been torn down. Don't look for another door."*

Our text uses the word "appealing" then to describe God reaching out to fallen mankind. We also note other *appealing* concepts or pictures in our text for this morning. Who has not, for example, felt the need to start over or to make a new beginning? It could be something as simple as crumpling up the picture you were drawing for mom and starting over, or something as significant as quitting a 20-year job to go back to college to start over in a different career. If you have ever wanted to shovel all of your old junk into the dumpster, if you have ever wanted to switch schools, remodel your kitchen, or just plain take a new direction in your life, then you know about the desire to start over.

And what a feeling it is to start fresh when you can no longer patch up the old. There's really nothing else like it. It happens naturally each spring when we get the chance to till under the old and to find simple joy in the tender new growth from God's earth. Fire can be a purifier that clears away old, dead, entangled masses and makes room for that which is fresh and new. When you and I are given the chance to start over, we should see it as an opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past. A fresh start assumes we will not repeat the poor decisions that got us into trouble or caused problems in the first place. Who, for example, would demolish an old, rundown house only to build an old, rundown house on the same site? Who would clear away accumulated junk from the attic, only to refill the attic with a new supply from the local landfill?

Now if all of this rings true in the physical, temporal world, know to look for it also in the spiritual. Our text speaks to us about the ultimate in starting over, the ultimate in beginning again: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."** The picture is of a human being who was at one time awash in the filth and perversion that is this world. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, washed us clean from all of that corruption. Our text put it this way: **"For our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** By his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus lifted us from the rot of sin, washed us clean, and clothed us with the robe of his own perfection. He did so by taking the filth upon himself. In washing *us*, *he* became corrupt in the sight of God the Father.

Here we find the ultimate fresh start, the most significant of all new beginnings. Do not externalize this truth. This is truly what has happened; and it has not just happened to someone else, it has happened to *you*. The *past* was nothing but sin and perversion. In the *present* we stand clean and pure in the sight of our holy God. Jesus has washed us clean. Our filth has been removed forever. Our sins have been forgiven.

Several natural questions then present themselves: *What do we do now? What about the future? What shall we do now that we have been washed, purified, granted a fresh new start?*

It is important that we recognize and acknowledge our natural tendency, which is to wander right back into the pit from whence we were rescued. That is certainly where the devil would like to lead us. Our text has other ideas: **"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. "** This fresh start that we have been given has not been given to us without purpose or direction for our lives. God did not send his Son to cleanse us so that we could return to the immorality of our former ways. He washed us and gave us new life with the expectation that we would not stain our new clothes with the old dirt, but walk instead in his holy service. That service is defined in our text: **"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."**

That means, quite simply, that the message we are to carry to the world is the proclamation that every single sinner has been reconciled to God – his sins having been placed on Jesus. That is the simple and yet profoundly

appealing "message of reconciliation" that God has committed to us – called us to share with the world. You have now been given this **"ministry of reconciliation"** as our text calls it. Your life's work, as God here defines it, is to tell your neighbor about this reconciliation. Nothing could ever be more important.

The work that lies before each one of us is not complex. It is, however, a rare and life-changing privilege. God the Holy Spirit fill each of us with joy and zeal to speak that most *appealing* message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us, enabling souls everywhere to share in the life we ourselves have been given. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Ezekiel 17:22-24** Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. ²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."

ESV **Mark 4:26-34** And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." ³⁰ ¶ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." ³³ ¶ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 17, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 748 (Verses 1-3) *(Brown Hymnal)*
"Praise to the Lord the Almighty"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Ezekiel 17:22-24) God often revealed his prophetic intentions for mankind in pictures. So also in our first reading he speaks of taking a part of a tree and making an entirely new tree from it. By faith we hear or read these words and apply them to both the nation of Israel and to the purpose for the nation of Israel, Christ Jesus our Lord. As it is God who builds up and destroys nations, so it is God alone who provides salvation.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 121 (Page 42)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 4:26-34) Our second reading from the Gospel of Mark speaks in large part to mission work. Since such work is to be our life's objective, we ought to be intensely interested whenever God speaks on the subject. Of particular comfort in this reading is the fact that the power to covert lies within the Word itself. Our calling is simply to spread that Word so that its power can be brought to bear on the human heart.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 761 *(Brown Hymnal)*
"In You Is Gladness"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*
"Appealing"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -163 *(Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)*
"The Death of Jesus Christ Our Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Brown Hymnal page 17)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Brown Hymnal page 20)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -748 *(Verses 4-5) (Brown Hymnal)*
"Praise to the Lord the Almighty"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (30) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour
Thursday	- 10:00 a.m.	– Opening Session of CLC Convention
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour

CLC News – Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI has called Pastor Rob Sauers. Pastor Caleb Schaller is considering call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Teacher Seth Schaller has returned the call to Faith of Markesan, WI.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the CLC Convention in Eau Claire from Thursday through Sunday of this week, along with Delegates P. Pfennig and T. Meyer.

Church Council Notes – The Council met on June 10. Treasurer Mantz reported that YTD offerings are now ahead of budgeted needs. Timothy Meyer was approved to replace Samuel Meyer as a delegate to the CLC Convention. VBS was approved for the second week in June (times TBD). The Church Picnic is scheduled for July 15. The Council approved ad hoc evening sessions where members who play an instrument can meet to use their talents in the praise of our God. All are welcome. A committee is being formed to investigate the feasibility of opening a school in Bismarck. The Council discussed security issues and will report to the congregation. The next meeting is scheduled for July 22nd.