

"Connected"

Text: Ephesians 2:4-10

May God the Father not only fill you with all good things in Jesus Christ, but may you also be given the wisdom to *recognize* and *appreciate* all that your God continues to do for you, day in and day out, moment by moment, and on into eternity. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I would imagine that when you hear that someone is "*connected*", you naturally think in terms of someone who has prominent friends – friends in high places – especially if they are described as "*well connected*." This morning we're going to consider it from a little different perspective.

Do you remember, for example, holding someone's hand when you were little – mom, dad, grandparents, maybe an older sibling – and how connected that made you feel? There was a simple sense of security when someone bigger, older, stronger, held your hand. Whether or not you actually were more secure, you just *felt* safer, less apprehensive. Now that you are older you probably find yourself on the other end of that relationship. Little ones now hold onto your hand because you are the one that they trust; you are the one that gives them a sense of security or comfort. There's just something about being connected in that way.

Now switch to a more spiritual level and imagine yourself connected to your Savior-God. Wouldn't it be great to be able to reach out whenever you are scared or sad or depressed and to feel the Savior's touch? Wouldn't it be awesome to be able to let Jesus be in charge? To let Jesus be the one to make the decisions and to do what is right – to the point that all you would have to do to feel calm and safe is to follow where he leads? The fact is you *are* that well connected right now. Jesus himself promised never to leave or forsake you. Before he left earth to return to heaven he promised to be with us until he comes again.

As remarkable and comforting as that is meant to be, there is even greater comfort in knowing that it is *Jesus* who wants to be connected to *you*. It is Jesus himself who wants you by his side, Jesus who moment by moment reaches his hand out to you in his Word. Jesus who wants you to spend eternity with him in the mansions he has prepared. He wants you with him in eternity. What a remarkable truth.

We read of our Savior's desire to be connected with us in our text for this morning. While all Scripture qualifies as magnificent, these words this

morning hold a special place in the hearts of many Christians because of their clear and simple proclamation of the gospel and of our God's incredible love. Our text is found in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the 2nd Chapter:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:4-10** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

This is the Word of God. We hold these words in such high regard both for the spiritual life that they create and sustain in the hearts of unworthy sinners and for the untold sorrow and misery that they prevent. That God would so bless each of us through these sacred words, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Permit a rather random thought that we will connect in due time to this morning's theme. Have you ever watched one of those ridiculous zombie movies? I can't help but wonder if the walking dead in those zombie movies realize that they are dead. Although both the movies and the thought behind them (or lack thereof) are silly and pointless, not so with the true "walking dead" we encounter all around us every day. *They* have no idea they are dead. They can certainly be aware that *we* regard them as spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ, but they immediately dismiss the idea. They don't *feel* dead, so we must be the ones that are clueless. We all have experience in this area (since every one of us was born spiritually dead) it's just that some of us were too young to remember when it all changed. The point here is that our text makes it clear that you and I were *rescued* – in the true sense of the word – because we were saved at a time when we were powerless to help ourselves. We were saved at a time when we were spiritually dead, but we neither knew nor cared.

We hear this divine truth often, but it is really in learning to appreciate this reality that the gospel truly fills us with the sense of relief that it

should. In fact it is a general statement of truth that if you hear a proclamation of the gospel and it doesn't fill you with a sense of comfort, escape, and/or release, you are probably not really thinking about it as you should. Part of the problem is that Christians now view the world through much different eyes compared to how we once lived. Once we viewed the world through our eyes of death and ignorance. Now we see and understand things that were once hidden from us. Our whole understanding of reality and the way we think and feel has been altered so profoundly that it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to appreciate how helpless we were apart from Jesus.

Our text says simply, **"Even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ..."** Our problem was immeasurably compounded by the fact that we neither knew nor cared that, spiritually speaking, we were the walking dead – spiritual zombies. We were so captivated by sin and Satan that we neither knew nor cared about either the death that was in us or the fate that awaited us. The godless might hear the warnings of Christians, but the spiritually dead sense no impending peril.

Understanding the way things used to be for each of us gives us a little better understanding of, and appreciation for, the conversion that has been worked in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit. It also helps us to appreciate just how foolish it is to imagine that at our conversion we were anything other than recipients of a gift. How silly – how insulting to the Holy Spirit – to imagine that we could have brought ourselves to life while we were in such a state of spiritual death. Our text rules out any such possibility with words that rank among the clearest of all gospel presentations: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

Why did God do such a thing? Why, when we rightly acknowledge that there was nothing good or worthy in any human being, did God send his Son Jesus to secure our rescue? Our text does not leave the question unanswered: **"God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us... made us alive together with Christ."** Our rescue stands as an unalterable testimony to the love and mercy of our God. Do not fail to apply this simple truth to yourself. Take it personally, for herein is revealed the love of your God for you, personally. God the Father sent his Son, and then called *you* to saving faith in that Son as your Savior. He made *you* the object of his generosity and love. He determined from all eternity to have mercy on *you* by rescuing you. In all of this, you

and I are not magnified, God is, for demonstrating his mercy and love toward those who have in no way earned it.

And yet there is more in this treasured text. God also here teaches us that his grace enables our participation with, *our connection to*, Christ. Our text put it this way: **"God... raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ... For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** We look now more closely at these words in an effort to learn what it means that our rescue by our God *connects us with Christ*.

Far from the "walking dead," we are now alive and seated with Christ **"in the heavenly places."** Paul emphasizes this truth, this connection to Christ, five different times in this Letter to the Church in Ephesus. His point is that Christians are joined to Christ their Lord in all ways. That means that not only are we joined to him in his death, we are also joined to him in his resurrection and in his subsequent glory in heaven. How can we simple, sinful human beings comprehend such things? Why would God desire to give such gifts to the likes of us? Why would God in heaven choose to be connected for all eternity to sinners like you and me? Permit a story from ancient Rome by way of explanation.

In a day and age when one's standing in society was gauged primarily by outward accessories like clothes and jewels (not so different from today) the story is told of a matron of high standing in the ancient city of Rome who attended an important social event in plain dress and without adornment – something that was startlingly uncharacteristic for her. When asked by another guest, *"Where are your jewels?"* the woman pointed to her two sons and replied simply, *"Those are my jewels."*

Our text teaches us something remarkable in this regard. We here learn that if God were to be asked such a question in heaven, he would point to you and me and to the rest of the rescued sinners in heaven and proclaim, *"There are my jewels, because there is the evidence of the nature and richness of my undeserved love."* Our text affirms this truth when we are told that our God saved us **"so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** In other words, God can and will use us in heaven as the bright, shining examples of his grace, his undeserved love and mercy toward those who were in no way deserving or worthy. Note that there is no room for human pride here.

The whole point will be that God rescued the unworthy and undeserving.

Does this suddenly give you pause? It does me. Do you think of yourself as the kind of Christian that could be used by God as an example? What would your qualifications have to include to hold such a position? The logical, worldly side of us reasons that we would have to prove worthy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our qualification is that once we were clueless, dead sinners – bent on destruction and headed for hell. That being the case, then I am qualified, and that is exactly the point. God would not point to those who needed no Savior as examples of his grace and mercy. He would not point to those who needed no rescue as shining evidence of his undeserved love. He would and will point out wretched sinners who were nonetheless washed clean by the blood of the Lamb – lousy sinners that he rescued – for therein is God's greatness, generosity, and benevolence revealed.

How, though, does all of this affect our individual lives going forward? To find an answer return for just a moment to that Roman woman and her sons. Would that woman have used her sons as examples had they been notorious scoundrels? Probably not. More to the point, suppose you were one of those sons. How would you regard your own actions going forward, knowing that you were being held up as an example of a parent's greatest earthly wealth and adornment? Obviously any person of character would take such a role very seriously and make every effort to walk worthy of such trust.

How much more then with God? That new man in you takes great delight in living in and fulfilling such a role. Not so your sinful flesh, which wants anything but such loving obedience. Recognize then the high calling that is yours, together with the role that accompanies such a calling. Our text reminds us of this with these words: **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** Your heavenly Father takes great delight in your acts of obedience and love – not unlike human parents when they witness the fruits of faith in their children. Do such actions earn the love of God? Obviously not. Our text makes clear that we possess God's love as a gift given to us because of the actions of Jesus Christ, his Son. Conforming our lives to his will is how Christians say thank you.

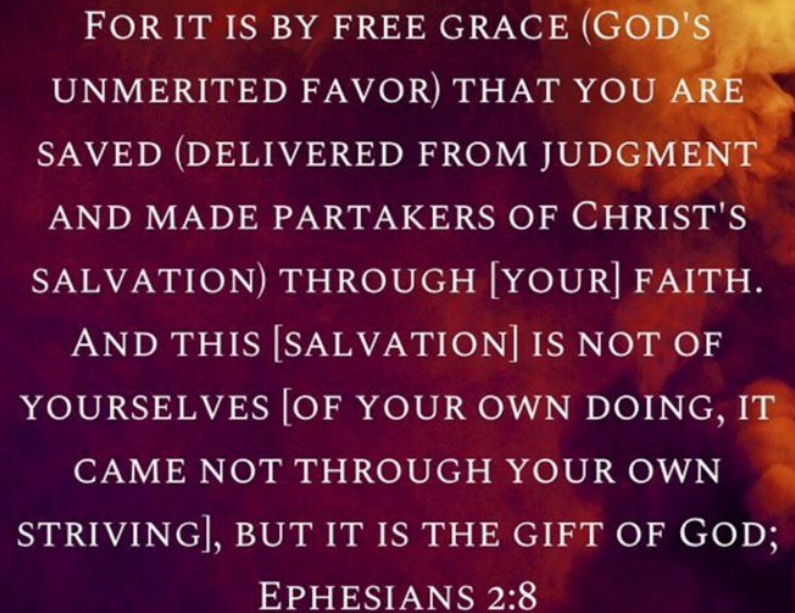
In much the same way we also love our own children unconditionally, and yet how our joy in them is compounded by their fruits of faith. So also now our great joy and desire is to live according to the desires of that new man in us – wholeheartedly embracing our roles as God's children. Our desire is to live our lives as shining examples of his undeserved love. This is

good and right in the eyes of God the Father, and in this we rejoice day by day. So too later in this same chapter Paul writes: **"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."** (Ephesians 2:19) Thank God for the life that he created and sustains in us, and for the work he has given us to do as his beloved children and heirs. Walk worthy of your calling and position as those your God wants by his side in heaven, connected to him for all eternity. Amen.

^{ESV} **Numbers 21:4-9** From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." ⁶ Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

^{ESV} **John 3:14-21** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ ¶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:4-10** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



FOR IT IS BY FREE GRACE (GOD'S
UNMERITED FAVOR) THAT YOU ARE
SAVED (DELIVERED FROM JUDGMENT
AND MADE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S
SALVATION) THROUGH [YOUR] FAITH.
AND THIS [SALVATION] IS NOT OF
YOURSELVES [OF YOUR OWN DOING, IT
CAME NOT THROUGH YOUR OWN
STRIVING], BUT IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD;
EPHESIANS 2:8

ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 10, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 148 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

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

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

The First Lesson: (Numbers 21:4-9) Our first reading is the account of the bronze serpent made by Moses during the days of Israel's wandering. It ought to be readily apparent to us that since just looking at a bronze statue does not provide medical treatment for a problem, so also the solution to Israel's problem was spiritual rather than physical. It is also clear to Christians that the statue was intended to be a type of Christ. Those who look in faith to Christ, who also hung on a tree, will be saved.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37)

The Second Lesson: (John 3:14-21) Jesus himself here teaches us that the true cure for our sin problem is looking in faith to Him alone as our Substitute. It is a profound and damning error to imagine that anything like our own good works or actions could ever substitute for Jesus' perfection. Those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith will naturally do good works, but such works flow naturally from justified believers as our way of saying thank you for what Christ has done.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 457 (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Sermon – Ephesians 2:4-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Connected"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 310 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

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 – 148 (Stanzas 6-9) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

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 Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (43) Average (42) Wednesday (22)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-4:30 p.m.	– Board of Elders Meeting
	-6:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News –Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Matthew Kranz has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Teacher Levi Schaller has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. He is still considering the call to Messiah of Hales Corners.

Elders and Church Council – Both the Board of Elders and the Church Council are scheduled to meet tomorrow at 4:30 pm and 6:00 pm respectively.

CLC Youth Camp – is scheduled for June 9-15, 2024, on the Immanuel campus in Eau Claire. The camp is open to those entering grades 6-9 and the cost is \$140/camper. Registration will open **this Saturday, March 16th at 10 AM CST**. For more information visit youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp