

In the name of Jesus, who so richly gives us His Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

There was a man who loved a woman.

- She had his whole heart!
- Her birthday came and he decided that he really wanted her to know how special she was to him and how much he loved her.
- He wanted to express his love to her in as many ways that he could imagine.

As she sat at work that day, a deliveryman came with a bouquet of flowers and a note that read, “Happy Birthday! I love you.”

- He took her for lunch that day to her favorite restaurant, and a little card on the table read, “Happy Birthday! I love you.”
- At the end of the meal, he gave her a gift to unwrap, jewelry.
- He looked her in the eye and said, “Happy Birthday! I love you.”
- Coming out of the restaurant, she looked up and there was a low-flying airplane pulling a banner, and sure enough it read, “Happy Birthday! I love you.”

And after work that day when she got home and was sitting and thinking what a nice day it had been, and all the many ways her beloved had been so nice to her and expressed how he loved her.....

- The doorbell rang, she opened it, and there stood 3 people who started singing.
- It was a singing telegram expressing the man’s love for her.

In our Lenten sermons for these 11:00 services, we are focusing on the enormity of God’s mercy for us in Christ, and taking time to trace the great dimensions of his love.

- Last week the sermon’s theme was, “Love that spares no cost” and we reflected on the staggering cost that God was willing to pay for our good.....the precious blood of Christ.
- This week our theme is how God’s love comes to us in many ways.

In our Gospel reading read to you a few minutes ago.....Jesus has risen from the dead but not yet ascended into heaven.....

- And He addresses His disciples with this important, central truth.....
- That His coming into the world, that His suffering and dying and rising again from the dead.....has all been towards this end: The forgiveness of sins.
- And so Jesus now is sending His disciples out into the world.....to call people to repent of their sins and to proclaim the forgiveness of their sins in His name.

Why is the forgiveness of sins so important? Have you ever thought about what it would be like without the forgiveness of sins?

- Without the forgiveness of our sins, we are separated from God.
- Without the forgiveness of our sins, we stand as God's enemies.
- Without the forgiveness of our sins, God does not look upon us with favor, He does not look upon us as His dear children.
- Without the forgiveness of sins, every day of our lives we are storing up wrath for ourselves before God.
- Without the forgiveness of our sins, we should rightly go through this life glancing over our shoulder all the time, wondering how and when God Himself is going to oppose us and punish us.
- Without the forgiveness of sins, not even our death, not even the end of the world, could bring us shelter from God's judgment.

Every person in this world will one day stand before the judgment throne of God, who is just and holy.

- And without the forgiveness of sins we would be condemned, excluded from God's glorious presence and His joyous kingdom, and subject to eternal punishment.

But now, with the forgiveness of our sins, in Jesus' name, God now looks upon us with favor and pure love.

- With the forgiveness of our sins, in Jesus' name, we are reconciled to God and every moment of our lives God now regards us as His dear children.
- With the forgiveness of our sins, in Jesus' name, we can know with confidence that, on the day of judgment, there will be no wrath, no punishment, but rather a joyful embrace in the arms of our loving God.
- With the forgiveness of sins, in Jesus' name, we will receive all good things in endless joy and eternal pleasure.

To display His great love for us, then, God gives us the gift that we need more than anything else.....the forgiveness of sins.

- God sends this gift out into the world, desiring that all nations, that all people, receive it.

The forgiveness of sins is not some hidden mystery to be discovered.

- The forgiveness of sins is not something we need to hunt for in the bowels of some deep cave, guarded by a dozen deadly traps and snares, like a treasure in an Indiana Jones movie.

- The forgiveness of sins is not a prize that we need to climb up into heaven to attain, or that we arrive at through meditation or self-enlightenment.

Rather, the forgiveness of sins is something that God sends to you and me, something that God brings to you and me.

- Hear again these words from our Gospel reading for today.....
- Jesus said to His disciples, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

God sends this forgiveness forth.

- This greatest of gifts ends up in your hands because God wants to give it to you, because He brings it to you.

In the catechism we confess, “In this Christian Church God daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.”

- Two key words here. Daily and richly.

Daily?

- Yes, every day God extends His forgiveness.
- Just as He teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread”, so also He teaches us to pray, “And forgive us our trespasses.”
- We need forgiveness and God grants us forgiveness just as continually as we need food, that is, daily!
- “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” Lamentations chapter 3 verses 22 and 23.
- God forgives us daily, every day.

But what about the second word, richly:

- God loves you so extravagantly that, just like the man who declared his love through flowers and a meal and jewelry and declaring it out loud, not to mention the airplane and singing telegram,.....
- God gives you this greatest gift of forgiveness of sins in numerous ways.

First, God conveys His forgiveness to you through the spoken Gospel.

- In whatever means it comes to you, you hear about Jesus Christ and what He has done for you.

- You hear about His love, His faithfulness and obedience, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, His compassion and His power to help.
- Through the message of the Gospel, you hear that He has come to be your Savior, and that He now lives forever to help you, to forgive you, and to bring to you eternal life.
- As you hear these things, as you hear this powerful, active gospel word, God is working repentance and faith in your heart.
- God is declaring to you His love, God is bringing you forgiveness in Jesus' name.

But God is not content to declare His love for us and to grant us forgiveness in only one way.

- God also brings His forgiveness to us in Holy Baptism.
- Because of God's powerful grace and promise, we enter the waters of baptism soiled with sin, and we come forth clean and forgiven in Christ.
- As Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Acts chapter 2 verse 28.
- And as Ananias urged Paul, "Whose name then was Saul, Brother Saul, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on Jesus' name." Acts chapter 22 verse 16.

And our Lord is yet more extravagant.

- He also invites us to His sacred table, to commune with Him, to eat and to drink His very body and His very blood.
- "This is My body which is given for you. This cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."
- Just as during His earthly ministry our dear Lord ate with tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners, so also today Jesus continues to display His enormous love to sinners.....
- He invites sinners like you and me to this blessed sacrament at His altar.

And our Lord is yet more extravagant in His love and mercy.

- He has also entrusted to His church the power to speak forgiveness directly in His name, in the words of Holy Absolution.
- So that, when, in spite of all His other assurances, our hearts still doubt our forgiveness in Christ, God has authorized human beings to pronounce His pardon.....
- To say, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
- And Jesus tells us this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

The preached and spoken word, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Holy Absolution. But yet there is even more!

- Not exactly a singing telegram, but God does send others into our lives to testify to our forgiveness in Christ and to bring that forgiveness to us in Jesus' name.
- Not only forgiveness of sins from the pastor's lips, but also from the lips of others.
- God Himself is at work, beating back the sinful unbelief and stubborn doubts of our hearts.
- Through the lips of a friend, a sibling, a parent, a child, a neighbor, even there God testifies to and displays His love for us.

In these several ways God piles up His love in our lives, he heaps up the assurances, that in Jesus' death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven.

- Critics may ask why God would need to grant His forgiveness in so many different ways.
- But the Bible encourages us to trust in the forgiveness which God gives us so richly in all of these ways.
- It is not some different forgiveness, it is all God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake, grounded in the death and resurrection of our Savior.

Lutherans rejoice to receive all of these gifts because God Himself has given them to us, in love.

- When Jesus declared that, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations".....
- He was including all these blessed means by which God daily and richly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers.

God loves you, dear friends, with an enormous love.

- And in the extravagance of His love, and in His great concern that you be constantly certain and sure of it, He extends heavenly forgiveness to you in these many ways.
- It's like He wants to be sure you keep warm, and so He gives you not one coat, or two coats, but several coats.

Who needs 4 or 5 coats? We might say that's ridiculous.

- But God knows that sometimes the world can be very, very cold.
- And He wants you to remain always in the warm security of His love.

Praise be to Him, who has so loved us in His Son, and who makes that love and mercy known to us in many ways.

- Amen.

(Please remain seated) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Recall our theme for this Lenten Season is, “O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High.

- It was taken from the hymn with that same title, hymn number 544 in our Lutheran Service Book.

If you have been able to be with us from the beginning, I had said that over the course of this Lenten Season, perhaps we could learn this song.

- And as we become more comfortable with it, perhaps we could use the learning this hymn to parallel this Lenten Season as a time for growth in Christ.
- So today we are going to introduce this hymn, and sing it for the first time. I invite you to turn to page 544 in your hymnal as we are introduced to this hymn and begin becoming familiar with it.

We now continue with our prayers as read responsively on page 265 in your hymnal. Our prayer response as printed in your bulletin will be, “Lord have mercy.” (MOVE TO ALTAR)