



## Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

**Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!**

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

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### **"The 'Love Your Neighbor' Thing" – Romans 13:8-10**

*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – June 25, 2017*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from 1 Peter, the first chapter.

My dear family in Christ, you may recall a few years back a series of billboards appearing along major highways. The signs each as a short saying and then it would end with a dash, followed by "God". I remember one read, "**Don't make me come down there. - God.**" Someone told me of one on Facebook that I hadn't seen before. It read "**That 'Love Thy Neighbor' thing...I meant that. – God**". Yes, He does. It's commanded in the Old Testament. Jesus says to love one another as we love ourselves. The apostle Paul repeats it in this letter to the Romans. God means it when He says, "**Love your neighbor.**"

And He calls for it because He first loved us as our neighbor. Recall with me how Jesus defined neighbor for us. In the parable of the Good Samaritan a man was beaten and robbed. He is left alongside the road to die. A couple of religious types happen by and they see the man groaning in pain. But they pass him by. Then a Samaritan man – someone who would not be liked by the people listening to this parable – stops and helps the man. He gently and patiently tends to the wounds. In an act of kindness and goodness he takes the man to place where he will receive care. In

generosity, he pays for the man's room and whatever the cost may be. This good Samaritan proved to be a neighbor to the wounded man alongside the road. But not just the Samaritan was a neighbor that day – in a way the two of them became neighbors on that day, the Samaritan loving his neighbor on that day.

Now doesn't that description apply to our Heavenly Father as He comes along in our lives? Every one of us needs God's patience and gentleness. We all need His goodness and kindness. The sin in our own lives, the evil of this world, the deep wounds created by Satan's ugly work: oh, yes, we are all in need of God's help. And help He does. He takes His own word seriously, and as our good and gracious neighbor, He loves us as His neighbors.

Look at how God does this: **but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8). Everything flows from God's love. In our great need – the need for forgiveness of sin – He sent His Son. At just the right time Jesus hung on a cross. Can you imagine the pain as God the Father turned His face from Jesus at that moment? Jesus, teeming with all of our sins, the evil of the whole world, and the ugliness and wounds of Satan's work, is suffering the punishment of hell and death. And yet, even when Jesus cried out, **“My God, My God, Why have You abandoned Me?”**, God's love for us would not stop. Christ Jesus died for us. *God takes His words about loving us, His neighbors, seriously.*

Or look at it through the eyes of Jesus in Galatians 2:20: <sup>20</sup> **I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** Look at that last line. Jesus loved me and gave His life for me. Jesus lives in us – we live by faith in the Son of God. As a poster I've seen of an empty cross puts it: **“It was not the nails that**

**held Christ to the cross but His love for you and me.”** At the cross we see that *God takes His words about loving us, His neighbors, seriously.*

Then, too, look at God’s love from what the Holy Spirit does for us. He pours into our hearts God’s love: **and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** (Romans 5:1). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes what our lives look like when the Holy Spirit pours God’s love into us. He calls it the fruits of the Spirit. The list begins with love and one writer suggest that love is the summary of all the rest. When the Holy Spirit pours God’s love into our hearts, the life we now live grows in joy and peace, peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The self-same love that God shows to us, He pours into our hearts. *Yes, God takes His words about loving us, His neighbors, seriously.*

And He wants us to take those words seriously, too. That “Love Thy Neighbor” thing? God meant that. He wants us to love our neighbors, those He places in our lives who need help in some way. In this passage from Romans Paul lists four commandments: don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t covet.

So, instead of murder, love your neighbor with gentleness and patience. Instead of sexual immorality, be faithful and practice self-control. Instead of stealing, be gentle and good. Instead of desiring what isn’t to be yours, be joyful and at peace with what others have. St. Paul provides a wonderful description of what life looks like when God’s love is poured into us.

But how hard that is to do! Look around. There is always more loving to do – and overwhelming amount. Weekly I get requests for money. The organizations and charities are doing good work, but so many requests! The GoFundMe requests on Facebook are legion, as are the

struggles people are enduring. But how many times can you see heartbreaking stories before you become weary of it all?

Then you open your eyes and see just who your neighbor is – some of these people are the ones you're not so fond of seeing: who talk and act differently, who are voting for the other party, people who have hurt you, people who have hurt people you love, people with whom we disagree when it comes to protests or police. **“These people are too hard to love, Lord.”**

But it's not too much for God. The Father still loves. Jesus still forgives. The Holy Spirit continues to pour His love into us.

So, the fruit continues to grow. What's important to know is that we cannot love everyone at once. We cannot help everyone all the time. But we can love the neighbor God brings into our lives in those surprising, everyday moments.

In a Lutheran Hour Ministries devotion (Fruit Pies, July 7, 2016), Pastor Ken Klaus related the story of a family eating at a fast food restaurant – a mom and three children. When they sat down, the youngest (a five-year-old) said the prayer. It went like this, **“Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest and let these gifts to us be blest. And Lord, if mom would add the gift of fruit pies for dessert, I would even be more thankful. God this is Your friend, Danny, signing out for the entire family. Amen.”**

Most who overheard the prayer smiled, but not the woman in the next booth. She said, loud enough to hear, **“That's what's wrong with this country. Kids don't' even know how to pray. As if God doesn't have other things to do than provide fruit pies. And since when do you sign out at the end of a prayer?”**

Danny was afraid he'd done something wrong. His mom assured him it was a fine prayer. A man leaned across the table and said he had been praying for many years and would rate the prayer

as one of the finest he'd ever heard. Then he added, **“It’s a shame more people don’t ask Him for fruit pies. You know fruit pies can be good for hearts and souls.”**

Well, the mother bought the fruit pies for the children. But when Danny got his, he turned around in the booth and tapped the woman who had criticized his prayer on the shoulder. He said, **“Here, I want you to have my fruit pie. Fruit pies sometimes can be good for our hearts and souls, you know.”**

You see how this love your neighbor thing works? Don’t give up because it’s too much. Rather, look for the person God has placed in your life that needs some patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness or one of the other fruits. We love one another, our neighbor, in the little everyday moment with the love poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

Here are some words to take home with you. Jesus said **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:34-35). Martin Luther’s commentary on this is **“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and the neighbor. He lives in Christ through faith, and in his neighbor through love.”**

There was a fad a few years ago. It encouraged you to summarize your life or life in general with just six words. It was interesting to see what people would write. Well, one way to summarize the Christian’s life is with these six words. **“God’s Love: Jesus. Now we love.”**

Yes, God loved us in Jesus, sacrificed on the cross. His love is poured into us by His Holy Spirit. And now what happens? We take God’s words “Love your neighbor” seriously. Because God meant them. Amen.