

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Colossians 1:1–14**

**Sermon: Unconditional Love**

The Introit for this Sunday is from Psalm 136:

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.  
It is he who remembered us in our low estates,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
and rescued us from our foes,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
he who gives food to all flesh,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.  
Give thanks to the God of heaven,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

We need our Lord’s “steadfast love” in our daily trudging,

because we too might tread upon a scene like the Samaritan did in our Gospel. (Luke 10:30–33).

Our Lord’s love is that which brings out our love. Without his love it is impossible to love our neighbor as we are instructed to do both in our Gospel and Old Testament reading. (Luke 10:27, Leviticus 19:18)

So, we pray: ***“Lord Jesus Christ, in Your deep compassion You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves.”***

Oh, that we could love as our Lord commands! Oh, that we would love others as we already love ourselves. Oh, that we would love ***“so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”*** (v 10). Oh, that we would be known as our community’s “Good Samaritan” for helping, for kindness, for sacrifice, for love.

Truthfully, our love is lacking, and it always will be. Because too often we separate our love from our deliverance, from our rescue by the hands and feet of our Savior.

When we think of being delivered or rescued, we probably think of those unfortunates thrust into a terrible situation. A person kidnapped or a child lost in the forest. People forced by stronger people to be enslaved need deliverance.

Victims of some terrible accident in a coal mine or on a highway need saving by heroic measures.

But from what do middle-class Americans need rescuing. A house payment? Too much debt? A bad job? We only imagine that these situations are the worst. They're not. Paul writes that we have been delivered "*from the domain of darkness*" (v 13). Eve's sin and Adam's fall have placed us in dire straits. We were from conception in the domain of the devil. We are not just hell-bound and bent on evil. We were born in the hellish and evil condition of sin.

The wages of our sin is death. We need rescuing. We need deliverance. "*Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" asks Paul (Romans 7:24). Only one can. Only one has. Jesus Christ it is.

Jesus' method of deliverance is quite unusual. He does it by dying. He does it by laying down his life, by paying the last penny, by giving up everything he has.

Many people are good neighbors, maybe they share from the abundance of their gardens or going shopping for them when they are unable. I remember when I was young our youth group would go to the homes of the elderly and cleaning up their yard and even painting their house. There are all kinds of ways we can be good neighbors. But Jesus' good neighboring to us is more extravagant.

Sin and death cannot be overcome by being nice and by loving our neighbor only the way we love ourselves. God's wrath over sin is real. His pronouncement to Adam that disobedience has consequences means just that. The consequence was death.

Overcoming death would not be accomplished by rain on tomato plants or sun on wheat fields. Death would be defeated by extravagant means. God would give the gift of his only Son through a Virgin. His only Son would give up his life on a cross as a once-for-all sacrifice. God would call this the "*free gift of righteousness*" (Romans 5:17).

While the judgment of God for sin brought condemnation, now the free gift of God in Jesus has brought justification.

Call it deliverance. Call it rescue. Sinful man would never have conceived such a plan. God did. By his grace. By his mercy. He has considered the poor, all mankind lost in sin, and has delivered the poor. Out of darkness and into light. Freed from the clutches of the devil and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son. All who are baptized receive this rescue. Holy Scripture plainly says, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16).

The Large Catechism plainly says, **“Therefore, state it most simply in this way: the power, work, profit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is this—to save [1 Peter 3:21]. For no one is baptized in order that he may become a prince, but, as the words say, that he ‘be saved.’ We know that to be saved is nothing other than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil”** (LC IV 24–25).

Paul is able to commend the Colossians for their love because it is not separated from the rescue of Jesus, his love. His love created faith in them and that faith works love (v 4). And not in the Colossians only. Paul can claim the Gospel's deliverance in the whole world (v 6) and the fruit it bears. The redemption won by Christ delivers all mankind in order that we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, in love.

But who loves first? Man or God? ***“We love because he first loved us”*** says John (1 John 4:19), and ***“by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”*** (1 John 3:16). God's love precedes our love. Faith precedes love. Faith loves the forgiveness of sin, wherever our Lord gives it.

If our Lord declared that the forgiveness of sins was in giving bags of the abundance of our gardens to our neighbor or leaving some of our grapes hanging on our vines for the hungry or in paying for an indigent's hotel room, we would listen. Listen!

We have heard the Gospel. It has come to us. We have believed it. We are redeemed. We are baptized. We eat our Lord's flesh and drink his blood. Often! It is for our forgiveness. It is to strengthen our love. Not only is there life in the body and blood of Jesus unto forgiveness; there is strength unto love of our neighbor.

Nevertheless, our love is not what it seems or what it ought to be. It needs bolstering, improvement. It receives strengthening from the faith given.

When the Lord's servant Moses spoke and taught the Israelites about loving their neighbors as they loved themselves (Leviticus 19:9–18), it seemed doable. Who would hate himself? If hungry, who would not want someone to provide him food? If falsely accused, who would not want someone to defend him? If oppressed, who would not want help? If taken to court, who would not like impartiality? If guilty of a sin, who would not desire the forgiveness of a brother?

Oh, that we would do what we would like done to ourselves!

But love of self is far easier than love of our neighbor. We fight our neighbor over fence-line property. We listen to one neighbor gossip about another neighbor and do not walk away. We have the freedom to speak against the oppression of our littlest neighbors, babies in the womb, and we will not stand, march, or sign petitions against their murder.

We fail to make proper judgments. Worst of all, we hold grudges and seek retaliation on those who have crossed us. Instead of making decisions based upon Scripture we allow the evening news or party politics to distract us.

Paul prayed for the strengthening of the Colossians as he wrote them this letter: *“being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light”* (vs 11–12).



The Christian fight (or race) is not an easy one. Long-term endurance is needed. Faith can falter and love can grow cold. God gives power, not according to our need, but according to the measure of his glory. A good measure. Abundant. Overflowing. For that is the nature of his love. In Jesus' name.

Amen