

## “Love One Another Earnestly from a Pure Heart”

*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22).*

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I'm glad you have come to worship, and I pray

this time will bless you greatly. Let me start today's sermon with this question: What motivated you to come to church today? Here's an experience I've had; maybe you've had it, too. When I drive around town, I often pass church signs inviting visitors to come. I don't know about you, but I would find it hard to walk into a different church, especially by myself, but if I knew someone in that church, someone whom I respect, someone who has heart, then it might be a different story. I might let my defenses down and maybe, just maybe, I would be open to spiritual talk and an invitation to attend that church. So, back to my opening question, what motivated you to come to our church today? **I think the beginning of the answer is the people, our people, you.**

Today is LWML Sunday. “LWML” stands for the “Lutheran Women’s Missionary League.” The LWML is an auxiliary of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and has members throughout North America. As the word “missionary” in their name suggests, they sponsor mission efforts reaching around the world. They do that with their mites, small offerings that together help more and more people learn the Good News about Jesus. **For this LWML Sunday, I’d like us to think about 1 Peter 1:22, *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.*** They say a picture is worth a thousand words. **You can picture today’s sermon by looking at the logo for LWML Sunday, “Our Hearts in HIS Hand.”**

**Think about a heart in a hand.** Literally, think about holding a real heart in your hand. That’s what a transplant surgeon does. He takes out the diseased heart with his hand and puts in a new heart. That’s what God has done to you and me. Do you see the cross and the drop of water in the logo?

You know what the cross represents, Jesus dying for the forgiveness of our sins. And what does the drop of water represent? I’m sure you know: Baptism. Baptism gives you a new heart, a pure heart with all the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. Long ago God had promised in the prophet Ezekiel, *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you,”* (Ezekiel 36:26). He has kept His promise. Unlike a physical transplant that lasts some years, the new heart God gives you through Baptism will live forever.

Lest you think this is just routine church talk, let me pause here for a moment. Why did God give you and me this “transplant?” Here’s why. I have within my heart thoughts and feelings, ideas, and urges that are sinful. My, if what’s deep down within me ever came out, I’d be so ashamed I would hightail it out of town. Don’t you also have things deep down in your heart that would shame you if others knew? My heart by nature is not pure and neither is yours. We are born with original sin, inherited from the sinners before us, all the way back to Adam and Eve, and we daily commit actual sins.

Sooner or later, what’s deep down is going to be known. *“No creature is hidden from his [God’s] sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:13). This sin in us, original sin and the actual sins we commit daily, this is the Old Adam who continues in us, yes, even in us who are forgiven — thank You, Lord, for forgiving us! — still, this sin will continue until the day you die. When you go to the funeral home to pay your respects to someone who has died, that person before you is no longer sinning. When you die, you stop sinning.

That’s the wonderful mystery of Baptism. Baptism brings us the forgiveness of Jesus Christ here-and-now and gives us grace to live new and holy lives here-and-now. Paul says, ***We were buried ... with him [Christ] by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*** (Romans 6:4). St. Peter describes it as a new birth. ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the***

***resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”*** (1 Peter 1:3). Mysteriously, Baptism is your daily death and new birth. When a surgeon transplants a human heart, new physical life comes to a fatally ill patient. Now God has mysteriously given you a new heart, a pure heart, newness of life ... and with the life God gives, you have love, His love.

***Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart*** (1 Peter 1:22). Two short remarks are necessary here. ***“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth”*** sounds like you have made yourself pure by keeping the commandments. That’s not what Peter means. Peter is simply talking about faith. Our new heart, our new birth, makes us “children of the heavenly Father” who trustingly look up to Him and want to live holy lives for His sake. Being pure before God is not our doing, it’s all grace. ***For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*** (Ephesians 2:8).

My second point of information about our sermon text is this: When Peter says faith is for a *“sincere brotherly love,”* he’s not excluding women. In the New Testament, the word “brother” often means both men and women who believe in Jesus. We could paraphrase it this way: Now that the cross of Jesus has come into your hearts through Baptism, love one another. Once again, the logo shows it so well. The cross comes through Baptism into your heart, into my heart, into each of our hearts. And each new, purified heart is surrounded by a much bigger heart. That’s the church, a big-hearted place, where all our hearts are together in His hand.

A big-hearted place filled with love. At the start of the sermon, I asked what motivates us to come to church. The beginning of the answer is, I think, the people: you, me, all of us together. As we experienced during the Covid crisis, we can hear the Word of God over the internet, but being together, in person around the Word, is the truest reason we come together. Together with one another, God gives us His Word, His Word of new birth, of life and love in Christ.

Together we receive this transforming Word as we hear it, spoken and sung, and as we receive it physically in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. There are various reasons we come to church, but more than anything else, we come to worship because here all our hearts are together, not only together with one another, but most importantly, together with one another in His hand.

When you think about it that way, there is something about worship that is different from other groups or associations you have during the week. Maybe you belong to an organization, perhaps a service organization, like Kiwanis or Rotary. Maybe you belong to a veterans’ organization, the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Maybe you belong to a country club or a fitness club. Maybe you just like to hang out with friends. That’s all well and good, but isn’t there, shouldn’t there, be something different about being together here, something uniquely special about fellowshiping with church members, gathering as the baptized to hear God’s Word and receive Jesus’ body and blood in the Holy Communion?

This is what’s unique about our coming together each week in worship. It’s here that God comes through His Means of Grace to make us a big-hearted fellowship filled with His love. That’s how we **“love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”** And that, I think, is the compelling reason we come to church.

And love those outside the church, too. Jesus is not content to hold only us in His hand. He reaches His hand out to others. When a leper met Jesus and begged to be healed, Jesus ***stretched out his hand and touched him*** (Mark 1:41). When Jairus’s daughter died, Jesus took her ***“by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cumi,’ which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’”*** and she had new life (Mark 5:41). When Peter tried to walk to Jesus on the water, he got scared and began to sink. ***Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him*** (Matthew 14:31). ***And he took them [the little children] in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them*** (Mark 10:16).



Today He reaches out His hand through you and me to people who don't yet know His life and love, to people who still have spiritually diseased hearts and desperately need the new heart Jesus gives.

Remember when I mentioned organizations outside the church, like civic organizations, veterans' groups, and the like? It's good when you are involved in those organizations. It's good because you have an invitation to extend to people who have their struggles, their hurts, their hopes, their joys, but who don't know Jesus. You're there because you have a heart, a new heart in His hand that is reaching out to others.

I'll wrap up with a quotation from Martin Luther: Then what is a pure heart? **What is meant by a “pure heart” is this: one that is watching and pondering what God says and replacing its ideas with the Word of God. This alone is pure before God, yes, purity itself, which purifies everything that it includes and touches.** Therefore, though a common laborer, a shoemaker, or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch, still he may sit at home and think:

“My God has made me a man. He has given me my house, wife, and child and has commanded me to love them and to support them with my work.” Note that he is pondering the Word of God in his heart ... If he attains the highest purity so that he also takes hold of the Gospel and believes in Christ — without this, that purity is impossible — then he is pure completely, inwardly in his heart toward God and outwardly toward everything under him on earth. <sup>i</sup>

I pray that describes each of us. I hope we will all take this logo home to remember the transformation that forgiveness has brought into our hearts and lives through Baptism. Coming together in worship, God makes us a big-hearted church that extends His hand of love to everyone. ***Above all, keep loving one another earnestly (1 Peter 4:8).***

**Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Luther, M. (1999, c1956). Vol. 21: Luther’s works, vol. 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther’s Works (21:33). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.