

June 18, 2023

Romans 5:6-15

“Christ Died For Us!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently, Arnold Schwarzenegger was quoted as saying that heaven is “some fantasy.” He said, “When people talk about, ‘I will see them again in heaven,’ it sounds so good, but the reality is that we won’t see each other again after we’re gone. That’s the sad part. I know people feel comfortable with death, but I don’t.” Other people have made similar statements from time to time. What caught my attention is that Arnold is willing to admit a sad part and doesn’t feel comfortable with death, although he is able to coldly and confidently dismisses any sort of an afterlife.

I will not presume to get into Arnold’s mind, but I can say from Scripture that two things might be going on when one makes a statement like this. Number one is that if a person has had a spectacular life down here it makes sense that they would want it to go on endlessly regardless of all the problems. Number two is that one cannot help but to be in some sense bothered by death because if death is the final word on life then what was life in the first place? Meaningless! But if there is undying meaning in life, then where did that undying meaning come from and what does it potentially say when life ends in such a sad way?

And that brings us to our epistle lesson where the apostle Paul mentions “the wrath of God.” In the first chapter of the book of Romans, before our epistle lesson, the apostle writes the following: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them (Rom.1:18-19).” People do not want to accept the obvious because it would change everything.

Now, usually, when people think of “the wrath of God,” they tend to attach to it the word “anger,” and some might even say “fierce anger.” The situation of humanity is a very sad and desperate one, for we are all under the fierce anger of God when we note that things down here are not right, or at least, they are not the way we want or think they should be. The sainted Lutheran theologian Martin Franzmann, in his commentary on *Romans*, puts it in this way:

God’s wrath, His fearfully destructive reaction to evil, strikes all ungodliness and wickedness (literally, “unrighteousness”) of men. It strikes them, for it is “revealed against them.” When God reveals Himself, He is going into action; revelation means, not “There it is, see it!” but “Here it is, have it, feel it!” When God reveals Himself, whether in wrath or in mercy, He takes over.

Losing friends, dying, and realizing that your life down here potentially means nothing at all, are thoughts that can bother us deeply, even if we are Christian. Whether one consciously recognizes that this comes from the wrath of God or not does not negate that these things are, in fact, to feel the fierce anger of God. It is here that our Creator really does take over, and we are hard pressed with the truth that he is out there and is not silent. We can’t help but to be bothered or sad because everywhere around us we are confronted with his existence and that there is something desperately wrong between us and him. People know that something’s not right, but most would prefer to ignore and live life the way they want.

The wrath of God that is being revealed is felt by humanity in various ways, and it becomes more and more palpable, as time passes by, unless the truth is suppressed. And many do suppress the truth. Many hold the truth down and simply refuse to allow it to work in them because what they love and want is contrary to the reality of God. To know the truth is to know God and to serve him rather than the self. No one wants that! People are much more willing to embrace their self-imposed ignorance because they love wickedness instead of righteousness.

What a blessing it is when the Holy Spirit convicts us concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Only when the wrath of God has been revealed, and this truth has not been suppressed and we feel it, are we then ready to hear the beautiful words of the gospel of forgiveness and heaven. Our epistle lesson goes on to say:

... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:8-11).

If one has not felt and acknowledged the wrath of God, they can ever appreciate these good and beautiful words that the Holy Spirit gives to us through the apostle Paul: while we were enemies of God, Christ died for us, and reconciled us to God that we might be saved from wrath. Martin Franzmann goes on to write:

This love which the Spirit reveals is love that originates solely in the will of God. There was nothing in us to inspire it; we were helpless, incapable of good, incapable of response. We were ungodly when that love sought us out, and we did not even want God's love. "At the right time," at the time of our utmost desperation and at the extreme of our revolt, Christ died for us.

Let me say those last four words again. **Christ Died For Us!** What that means is that regardless of our lovelessness toward the one who made us, God so loved you and me that he gave us the answer to losing friends and dying. There is an undying meaning to life - an undying love - even though wrath is revealed because of sin against God.

The love, that is being spoken of in our epistle lesson, is the same love that is sung in the first verse of a well-known hymn (LSB #700): "Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n, to earth come down! Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, All Thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, Thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love Thou art; Visit us with Thy Salvation, Enter ev'ry trembling heart." The Word became flesh, Jesus came down to this messed up earth to take the mess as his own, and in taking the mess to himself on the cross, he visited us with salvation. This is the greatest love that one may know and experience. This is the love of which the apostle John speaks in his first epistle: "... not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9).” Here we are to behold the love that casts out all terror over sin and death. Not only that, but it promises a new, future existence that will never know the possibility of sin and death - forever joy!

Christ Died For Us! This means that Jesus took to himself all our sin and every consequence so that we might have forgiveness and everlasting life. Whoever believes this will not perish. For everyone who believes this God has promised the following recorded in Isaiah 65:17-19:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

Losing friends in Christ and seeing them again, dying in Christ and being raised from the dead, and the joy that comes from knowing that there really is undying meaning in this life as the time where our Creator reveals himself to us and teaches everything we need to know to be with him forever, is not as Arnold puts it, “some fantasy.” It is from the Holy Spirit who has graciously flooded our hearts with an understanding, a conviction, and yes a feeling of both wrath and “love divine, all loves excelling.” **Christ Died For Us!** “We take refuge in the God whose love is the ultimate certainty in our lives,” Franzmann writes, “That love has been poured out into our hearts; that is something that has happened to us.” Yes, that is something that has happened to us! Praise God!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/movies/celebrity/arnold-schwarzenegger-says-heaven-is-some-fantasy-thats-the-sad-part/ar-AA1cd25v>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/wrath>