

INI

1 Peter 4,7-11

Easter 6 – Exaudi Sunday – 17 May 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Peter's First Letter, which was read earlier:

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Whether it is politics or the news, it seems that people are looking for that “Gotcha” moment. That is, when one can catch an opponent or an interviewee in a contradiction that cannot be explained away and is – no doubt about it – embarrassing.

Today, many young people are finding themselves the victim of their own foolishness. What with You Tube and various other social media, what would have been a private moment of embarrassment is now a public spectacle for all to laugh at – rarely do people laugh with. Furthermore, people are finding out that what is on the internet rarely if ever disappears. Perhaps it was not for nothing that in the Psalms David asks God not to remember the sins of his youth; God indeed may forget, but the internet is neither forgetful nor particularly forgiving.

But you know it is no secret that at times people do stupid things. People may sin. Could that ever happen to you or I? While I cannot speak for you, I can speak for me and I would say that it is within the realm of possibility. And you know, people even in Peter's day, a but

less than two thousand years ago, also did stupid things and perhaps even sinned.

So, are we to engage in “Gotcha” moments? Are we to troll the internet and dig up dirt on those whom we do not like. Are we to broadcast the failings of our friends and neighbors – or if not them, perhaps our enemies? Or do Peter’s words of advice for we who are living in the end times still hold true?

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**Love Covers A Multitude Of Sins.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Sin Uncovers**
- 2) Love Covers;** and,
- 3) Live, Forgive, Cover**

1) Sin Uncovers. Peter probably wrote this letter in the early 60s of the first century. He was probably in Rome and writing to Christians with whom had previously visited in Asia Minor.

It is clear from his letter, that Peter was writing to predominately Gentile congregations.

These new Christians were facing problems. So it is not surprising that Peter’s letter is a letter of hope. This hope is not the kind that says “keep a stiff upper lip.” This hope was reflected earlier in the letter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1,3)

In the face of trials, Peter is offering his readers and us a “living hope” in the resurrection of Jesus.

We do not know all the trials that these new Christians were facing, but it seems that slander was a major concern. Peter writes of their life before Christ – and notice that he uses “we” and not “you” –

... when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of *you*. (1 Peter 4,3-4)

It seems as if their former fellow-revelers could not understand what had happened and now wanted to slander these new Christians. They wanted to keep sin uncovered and drag these new Christians back into their old ways – the way of unbelief and death.

Well, that would be a concern. David speaks about this concern in Psalm 25:

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
According to Your steadfast love remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O Lord. (Psalm 25,7)

Who wants to be reminded of sins – big or small, deliberate or unintentional, all the stupid things one did in the past? No one.

David asked God for forgiveness. He didn't ask because David was now a vastly improved person and deserved forgiveness. David didn't deserve it. But he pleaded with God to forgive because God is full of steadfast love and forgiving.

But those Christians in Asia Minor were being reminded. Can we hear the taunts? “Oh, you think you're so good now. Well I remember when ...” And we can fill in the blanks.

The worst thing about the slanders was that they were probably correct. And perhaps this attitude rubbed off on the new Christians so

that they began to grade one another according to who had done less awful things in the past. Thus, their persecutors spread dissension within the community by pitting Christian against Christian.

Can we ever fall prey to the same attitude? Can we ever put ourselves up by putting others down? That's the attitude that says: "Did you know what so-and-so did way back when? Isn't that awful?"

This kind of comparison of sins is easy to do. As a matter of fact, sometimes its fun. The only bad part is that if we engage in this we laugh ourselves into hell because we trample on the forgiveness that Christ has won for us and makes a mockery of Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrificial death.

I say perhaps this attitude rubbed off on these early Christians because Peter pleads with his readers to "keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Thus Peter shows his readers and us that:

2) Love Covers. Peter speaks about fervent love, and the love Peter is speaking of is that love we call agape love, the love God showed us in His Son Jesus Christ, the love that covers a multitude of sins.

In our language, we have one word for love to describe a multitude of the kinds of love.

Agape love, however, is not the love that is moved by emotion; rather it is moved by will and commitment, John describes this:

Herein is agape love, not that we agape loved God, but that He agape loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
(1 John 4,10)

In the fulness of time, God sent His Son – this sending was an act

of will and commitment. It was an act of rescue – to rescue you and me from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Jesus was sent to be the propitiation for sin, which is just a fancy word for sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sins. All of them!

To this end, Jesus went into death to die for us; and He rose to be the guarantor of our resurrection in Him.

This is the essence of agape love: Will. Commitment. Steadfastness. Self-sacrifice. Caring for another. Serving. Reconciling. Redeeming. Forgiving.

But the idea of agape love as a covering for sins is not new. It runs throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

In Proverbs we read:

Hatred stirs up strife;
But love covers all transgressions. (Proverbs 10,12)

Here we see it. Cover. Hide. Protect. Blot out.

The Psalms offer a treasury of covering and hiding of sins, all showing the graciousness of our God.

You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin. (Psalm 85,2)

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered. (Psalm 32,1)

Have mercy upon me, O LORD,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,

Blot out my transgressions.
Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities. (Psalm 51,1+9)

But to cover, we must first uncover ourselves before God. Again the Psalms show us.

I acknowledged my sin unto You,
And my iniquity I have not hid.
I said I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD,
And Your forgave the iniquity of my sins. (Psalm 32,5)

Thus, God would have us realize and confess our sin. We approach God's mercy seat in the name of Jesus and plead the precious blood and righteousness of our Savior.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1,9)

Our sins are covered for Jesus' sake. This is the promise throughout all of Holy Scripture, for we have but one God, whose lovingkindness and steadfast love endures.

And as forgiven for Jesus' sake, we are now to:

3) Live, Forgive, Cover. Peter pleads with us now to practice the same agape love that God has given us in Jesus with ourselves and others.

First, we are to daily practice this forgiving love for ourselves. We are to remember what God has done for us in our Baptism.

In Holy Baptism we are buried with Christ into Jesus' death and resurrection. In His death we are to drown our old Adam along with our sins, along with all evil lusts. Then, we are to arise as a new forgiven

person who is to live before God in righteousness and purity.

Now our Baptism did not physically change us, and neither does daily forgiveness. Flesh remains flesh. But we are to be awakened to the fact that God now looks at us through the work and merit of Jesus. This is what Paul means when he wrote:

For you are dead, and your life with Christ is hid in God. (Colossians 3,3)

We are hidden, we are covered by Jesus for the sake of His agape forgiving love.

Second, this fervency is to be shown to each other. God has covered our sins by the forgiving agape love of Jesus so that in turn we might be forgiving.

This is what Jesus teaches in the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

As much as we do not deserve forgiveness, we are to heartily forgive those who sin against us.

This is hard, and there are no two ways about it. But what is the opposite? The opposite is to go about being eaten up by resentment.

Thus, to forgive others requires daily work. Sometimes the great hurts we have suffered require great prayer and fervency.

But life is too short to go about with a catalogue of resentments floating about in our heads, a kind of check list of all the grievances which we have suffered.

Peter says, "The end of all things is near." Here we see the

difference between the human and divine perspective.

The human perspective is that life is a long road. We see the past, we look towards the future, and we look around at the present. We look at that long road and think, “Better get even now before it is too late” – or thoughts to that effect.

God, however, looks at us through the Cross of Christ.

Paul asks: “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?” In Romans, Paul lists a number of things, both physical and spiritual which might separate us. In part, he goes on to say that neither “things present nor things to come” shall be able to separate us “from the agape love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8,38).

What is missing from “things present nor things to come”? Why “things past,” of course. The past is missing because our past has been covered over by God for Jesus’ sake. All of our past has been collapsed into the Cross of Jesus, in which we have forgiveness and life.

What about fervency? This is a word that is not used much in the Scriptures. But one place where it is used gives us an example of the intensity of how we are to forgive.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and prayed to strengthen Himself for the ordeal that was to come – that is, when He would go to the Cross for the sins of the world – He prayed “very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling upon the ground” (Luke 22,44).

We know that when a person is under great pressure, the small blood vessels in the forehead can rupture and blood will come forth like sweat. That is the kind of fervency with which Jesus prayed.

But we know all too well that the world, our flesh, and the devil will

ask, “Did God really say to forgive others?” Thus, we know all too well that sin always seeks excuses, always seeks to justify itself, always seeks to hide behind a hedge of righteous indignation.

But what did Jesus do on the Cross? He said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23,34). There on the Cross, Jesus, stripped before the world, asked the Father to cover the sins of those who had crucified Him.

Third, we know all too well, as those early Christians in Asia Minor knew, that the world is all too willing to throw our past in our faces. Indeed, it may sometimes happen that other Christians will do the same. And all too often, our old Adam within us will also do this.

But we do not cling to what we have done. We cling to what Christ has done for us.

In Romans, Paul writes:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ that died, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of the Father, Who also makes intercession for us (Romans 8,33-34).

For Jesus’ sake, God justifies – He has declared us forgiven! He has hid our sins, He has covered them up. Forgiven and covered on account of the agape love that is shown to us in our Savior.

For what sins has Christ not died? In a word, none!

Conclusion: Those early Christians had to wrestle with “Gotcha” moments – “gotcha” moments that perhaps their old pagan buddies would throw up at them. Perhaps in moments of weakness they felt tempted to do the same to their fellow believers. Perhaps their old Adam would also throw the past into their faces as well. And we have to

wrestle with “Gotcha” moments.

The forgiveness won for us by Christ, however, was the only source of forgiveness for those early Christians in Asia Minor and for us as well. And just as they, so also we are forgiven to be forgiving. And being forgiven, all are given various gifts of service by which the Word was to be proclaimed and others served. And thus the Church grows.

The best conclusion is given to us by Psalm 79,8-9:

Do not remember our former iniquities against us;
Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us;
For we are brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation;
And deliver us and forgive us for Your names' sake. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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