

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.

Second Sunday of Advent.

December 9, 2018.

God's love is yours through Jesus, who brings you into the light. Amen.

Why? Why do you do things? Why did you get up this morning? Why did you come here instead of out for breakfast? Why do you go to work just about every other morning? Why would you bother to tell someone about Jesus? Why? The young adults in our Catechism class now, and I pray those from previous years are just about jumping out of their seats and had to restrain their hands from shooting into the sky to answer why? Why? Because Christ's love compels us. Christ's love compels us is the motive for the Christian. Christ's love compels us is why we do things. I know Christ's love compels us isn't in this part of the Bible we just read, but God coming to expose the motives of the heart, those words are in this part of the Bible. And those motives are often hidden, often impossible for people to see. But what people can't see, God can. The action that looked the same on the outside had a very different motivation on the inside. And God is coming to expose those motives, good or bad. God is coming in Advent to expose the motives of the heart.

This part of God's Word first says our motives are determined by who we are. Who we are. Identity is a big word in our world today and here's how this part of the Bible identifies us. Servants of Christ and those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. The word servant sometimes is translated minister. Yes, the minister is a servant. The minister serves freely, voluntarily. The minister willingly learns his task and takes his orders from his master. The minister doesn't change the orders. Notice, it's not really just the pastor who is a minister. These things all apply to all Christians. All Christians are servants of Christ, serving willingly, voluntarily, gladly learning the task and taking orders from Christ. We don't change the orders and most importantly, we ultimately answer to Christ.

God has given us a big trust. We are entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Those entrusted were often called stewards. Maybe you are familiar with the term, stewardship. Stewardship means managing someone else's stuff for someone else. I guess if you didn't know what stewardship meant, now you do. The steward was someone with great responsibility. A steward was only necessary when someone had a lot of stuff. The term also implied the steward had a lot of freedom in managing the stuff. The steward often served at a distance from the master. He had quite a bit of freedom. Can you see why we continue to use this old word, "stewardship," today? It's all God's stuff. He's given us a big trust: to manage some of his stuff for him. It's not really your car. It's God's car. He's letting you use it for a while. They aren't really your children. They are God's children and he wants you to teach God's Word to them.

God has given you the mysteries he has revealed. They aren't called mysteries because they are spooky. They are called mysteries because the wonderful things of God are things we couldn't know on our own. God has to reveal them to us. I once dared to dry my hands on the dish towel in the kitchen. My wife naturally got upset. "That's not a hand towel! That's a dish towel!" As though I came out of the womb knowing the difference. But now, my wife has revealed this important mystery to me and so I know it. In the same way, none of us could ever have come up with this plan. "God should leave heaven. God should become a man. This man should live on earth for 33 years. Then he should die a terrible death by torture on two wooden boards. Then three days later this man should rise from the dead and ascend back into heaven. And he'll leave twelve guys on earth to spread the news." God had to reveal that plan

to us. And we get to share those marvelous mysteries.

Ok, but we are supposed to be talking about God exposing the motives of the heart. Sorry for my digression. Our motives are determined by who we are: servants and stewards. Next point: our motives are judged only by God. That might not be some great mystery. "Only God can judge," and, "Don't judge me," are two of today's most popular sayings. But it's ironic how often people who say that, we who say that, then instantly go and judge others by their own standard or play some comparison game. God says here, "Those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." Faithful is a vertical word, not a horizontal one. Faithful means I'm not comparing myself to others. I'm comparing my actions, my motives with the gifts God has given me. My wife is a smart and gifted woman. Don't ask me how she got stuck with me. She is so smart and gifted that a grade school teacher once said to her parents at a parent teacher conference, "Elizabeth is getting an A minus in this class. She's not doing her best." Who wouldn't be happy with an A minus? The one who is not comparing to others, but comparing to the gifts God has given. It's God evaluation that matters, not the stewards' evaluation, not the servant's evaluation. It's God evaluation that matters.

That thought is so important as we look at these next phrases. I'll be honest, some of these phrases troubled me at first. It took time and study for God to reveal to me in his Word, "what does this mean?" "I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court." Ok. That one makes sense. And as we mentioned that falls in line with popular opinion today. It's not a person's place to judge, only God's. Then the last phrase in this clause makes sense, too. "It is the Lord who judges me." The word for judge here though is interesting. It means more than just the usual, "Say something is wrong." It means to criticize, to scrutinize, to find fault, to search for fault, and even then to assign bad motives. "She goes to work, just to make more money, for herself. He goes to church just to look good. What a hypocrite. Pastor invites people to church to make more money for himself and to look good that he has such a big church. Double hypocrite." It's only God's place to assign the motive because only God can see the motive. Only God can see the heart.

And maybe that seems obvious to you when I say it. And maybe that makes the middle phrases here very clear, but it took me a while for God to open my eyes. When Paul, the man whom God used to write this book of the Bible, said, "I do not judge myself." Is he saying, "I don't care if I work hard. I'm fine with an A minus"? No! He's saying, "No human judgment matters. I care very little. God's judgment matters. My own opinion is not what's important. God's judgment is what's important. My own conscience isn't the final judge of right and wrong. God is the judge of right and wrong. Just because I feel good about myself doesn't make me good. It's only God who can justify me, declare my righteous." Paul is saying, "Even my own judgment is a human judgment and therefore not totally reliable like God's judgment is."

Do you really see what this means when it comes to so many popular ideas? Feeling like you did the right thing doesn't automatically make it the right thing. Having other people say you did the right thing doesn't make it the right thing. People's opinion, even Paul's opinion, is not the precipice of importance. God's Word is what matters. God is the judge. God will bring to light the things that are hidden in the darkness. God will expose the motives of the heart.

Wow! God has a whole different standard when he judges. Wow! This is really scary! Aren't you afraid of the dark, or what goes on in the dark or what might be in the dark? Would you want to know about the domestic abuse, the drugs, the dirty details of what's going on in the house down the street? Would

you want all your neighbors to hear every word you say, watch every TV show you watch? Would you want them to know the real reason you look better on the outside is that you are just afraid of getting caught? And while the action looks good on the outside, the sin of fear is the same on the inside. God will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness. God will expose the motives of the heart. Wow! Our sin makes that scary, terrifying.

But Jesus is coming to reveal a greater mystery than God's judgment on sin. Jesus came to reveal God's love. Jesus left heaven because he loved you. Jesus didn't want there to be a heaven without you. So Jesus revealed to you what you could never have thought of yourself: Jesus loves you! He loved you every day of his life. Every second he had the right motivation, because he wanted his perfect motivation to count as yours! Wow! Who would have thought of that? It was only love that compelled Christ to go to the cross. He was compelled to the cross, not by a whip, not by fear, but by love. Nails didn't keep Christ on the cross. Love kept him on the cross. Love for you. Love that never lets you go. Love that inspires a whole new way of life for you. Christ died for all that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but live for Christ who died for us and was raised again. Talk about motivation! We get to live for the one who died for us! We aren't just sliding by, keeping score on how little we can do for Christ. We are loving to live for Christ, doing as much as we can!

When your motive is, "Christ's love compels us," don't you want Christ to expose that motive? Think about your job. Being motivated by Christ's love will make such a difference. One gentleman who was coming to Bible study in prison worked in the prison laundry. Not very glamorous, prison laundry. But the other men at the study said, more than once, "We are so happy when we see him in the laundry. Because he doesn't short the cycle. Things get clean. He doesn't pull things out of the dryer too soon because he's lazy. He does a good job." Why? Because he's a Christian! He's showing Christ's love when he does the laundry. Maybe your job seems no more glamorous than prison laundry. Doesn't matter. Be compelled by Christ's love. That's what matters.

I pray you don't bring offerings just because the church needs money. You heard it here first. The church doesn't need your money. God doesn't want offerings that are given only out of guilt and purely because of need. You bring offerings because Christ's love is such a powerful force in your heart, you can't help but give. And you aren't giving just enough so the church can pay the bills, you are giving so much that we can keep spreading God's Word to more people in more places.

I know we've been talking a lot about that. Invite a friend to Christmas Eve. There's three invites in your service folder to make it easy to do that. Invite friends because Christ's love compels you. God doesn't want you to just check off your quota and do as little as pastor said to. God wants his love to compel you that you can't help it and you can't stop. I remember Joyce, a lady I knew in Milwaukee. I'll be honest, talking with Joyce was one of the first times I had shared my faith. And I had been a Christian over two decades. But when Joyce heard the good news, "Jesus loves you and Jesus died for you and you can be sure you are going to heaven because Jesus loves you," Joyce got this shiver up her spine and jumped for joy out of her chair. It wasn't about getting Joyce to church. It was about getting Joyce to Christ. It wasn't about getting Joyce to give offerings. It's about getting Joyce to heaven. Those invites in your service folder aren't about getting people here. They are about getting people to heaven. It's not about filling our church on Christmas Eve. It's about filling heaven, for all eternity. And why? Because Christ's love compels us. Amen.