

19th Sunday after Pentecost
October 19, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
175th Anniversary of the WELS: Christ THROUGH Us

Dear Friends in Christ,

175 years ago, three pastors in the Milwaukee area met together to form a new church body. The Wisconsin Synod began in 1850 with this small group. By God's grace, the WELS now has over 1,200 congregations in North America with over 300,000 members. Imagine yourself as a member of one of those first congregations near Milwaukee. You've recently immigrated from what would become Germany. You probably don't speak much English yet. You are working hard to provide for your family in a new land, and you cherish the opportunity to gather with fellow believers on Sundays around God's Word and Sacrament. I very much doubt that anyone in those first congregations dreamed about being part of a church body with so many churches and members. They simply went to church, made sure they had church buildings to go to, and arranged for pastors to serve them. Christ worked through these believers to grow our synod over the past 175 years. Therefore, we thank the Lord and pray that the Lord works through us to preserve and proclaim his truth for many generations to come.

Last week we focused on Christ FOR us and marveled that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. With the firm foundation of Christ FOR us, we look today at how Christ works THROUGH us. It is an amazing and often puzzling thought. Why, if Christ has done everything for us and for our salvation, does he entrust anything to us? Consider the gospel lesson for today. Jesus chose fishermen to be his disciples. What was he thinking? Maybe there were worse choices, but surely there were better choices too. Jesus could have chosen some teachers of the law who knew the Scriptures well. He could have chosen some Pharisees who had great zeal to keep the commandments. He could have chosen great orators or rulers or at least someone with name recognition. But he chose a man in Peter who couldn't keep his foot out of his mouth. He chose James and John who thought they were better than everyone else and deserved to sit at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom. He chose Andrew, who to this day is remembered mostly as the brother of Peter.

The Lord delivers the gospel to sinful people and through sinful people, some of whose names we remember, and many will never know. The apostle Paul tells us about the ministry we have been given, the way Christ works THROUGH us.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (EHV)

And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Although there are many wonderful, theological words here, one stands out. Reconciliation. Perhaps we can think of a family that becomes estranged. A child decides that his parents are too strict, too religious, too old-fashioned and he wants to live his own life. So, this child says many harsh things to his parents and leaves. He doesn't leave a forwarding address. He changes his phone number. He wants nothing to do with his parents ever again. But after a decade or multiple decades, he realizes that perhaps he was the problem. He wants to reconcile with his parents, so he shows up on the front door, apologizes and his parents welcome him back into their lives with open arms. Reconciliation in human relationships is wonderful!

But human reconciliation takes agreement from both parties to reconcile. There is no reconciliation if the parents refuse to answer the door or tell their son that it is too late. If the roles were reversed and

the parents wanted reconciliation with all their hearts but the son didn't, there would be no reconciliation. Human reconciliation is a two-sided agreement to restore a relationship that had been broken by one or both parties.

Listen again to how Paul describes God's reconciliation: *[God] reconciled us to himself through Christ....¹⁹That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...*

This is reconciliation by one party, by God himself. God starts and completes the reconciliation. We simply provided the reason reconciliation was needed. We provided the sin. We ruined the relationship with God. We estranged ourselves from God. We, in our sin, wanted nothing more to do with God.

Yet, in his grace, God reconciled us to himself through Christ. And I know that I can take zero credit for being reconciled. God did not look at all the people in the world and choose to reconcile the top 25% or top 50% or any such measurement. In Christ, God reconciled the world to himself. God has made peace with the world through Christ. God does not count any sin against anyone in the world because of Christ. How can God consider every sinner in the world to be his friend? How can God forgive the sin of the world? Paul tells us how in verse 21:

God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Not only did Jesus Christ not commit sin, he did not even know sin. Every thought and desire of Christ is and always was pure and holy. Nothing about Jesus' thoughts, words or actions was in any way sinful. The pure and holy Son of God became sin. That is a shocking statement. He became sin. He who did not commit one sin became sin. Upon the cross God moved your sin and my sins and the sin of the world onto Jesus and he became sin. Upon the cross, the punishment for sin was given to Jesus for he had become sin for us. So, where is your sin? It is not counted against you for your sin was put on the cross about 2,000 years ago. You have peace with God. You are reconciled to God through Christ.

God has done this for the world. He desired to reconcile with all sinners. He provided the means of reconciliation, the death of his one and only Son, for all sinners. Although this reconciliation is a universal truth, many in this world live without the comfort of believing that Christ has done this for them. God, in his wisdom, has decided to bring this message of reconciliation to sinners through other sinners like you and me. Jesus chose to send out the gospel message through fisherman and tax collectors and all kinds of sinners. Paul describes our work of bringing this message of Christ to the world as that of an ambassador.

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An ambassador represents and speaks on behalf of someone else. An ambassador in our government is to speak with officials in other governments and faithfully explain the position of our government. It is a prestigious and important role. We are ambassadors for Christ. This is a high honor to be given a role in bringing the good news of Christ to the world. It is not our work or effort that saves anyone. Yet Christ saves through the message we bring to others. We don't get to craft the message. Jesus has given us the message: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." The message is written in the Bible. We don't have to come up with something new to say. The message is to proclaim what Christ has done.

Christ worked through someone to bring you into God's family. For many, parents brought us to the front of church on a Sunday where a pastor poured some water on our heads and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." God worked through your parents to

bring you reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism. For many Christ continued to work through parents to teach everything Christ commanded. Our reading from Deuteronomy today shows the wonderful way Christ works through Christian parents to pass on faith in Christ to the next generation.

“These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Teach them diligently to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as a sign on your wrists, and they will serve as symbols on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Dt 6:6-9)

Christ through us is not about dreaming big dreams about saving the whole world. Christ has already reconciled the world to God. Christ through us is going about our daily lives surrounded by Jesus. Be an ambassador for Christ by using the name of Jesus in your homes, in your cars, in your workplaces, in the art we hang on the walls. These small, repeated contacts with the Word of God in your life and in the lives of your children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, friends and neighbors is how God works through you to bring his message of reconciliation to the world.

Our names are not recorded in the Bible like those of the disciples. Our names will probably never be even in a little history book of a small synod that has been around 175 years like the WELS. But it is exciting to think about what the Lord might do through us in the following generations. How many will know the peace and joy of Christ because God worked through the testimony about Jesus in our life? Thanks be to Christ for including us in this wonderful work.

Amen.