



John 13

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE*

The Christian Journey: a Lutheran Perspective

■ It's all about love - God the lover creating the universe, calling Sarah and Abraham, freeing the slaves, gathering a covenant people to model love, and becoming one of us.

Jesus, revealer of God's love, reached out to all - the poor, the outcast, and those told they were not worthy of God's love.

Such love threatened the powerful. They nailed him to a cross. There God showed a heart of love. There God bore the sin and violence of humanity. On the cross Jesus revealed God's will to love even unto death...

and there Jesus died.

It is finished.



The Word became flesh.

Your sins are forgiven.



Have you heard the good news?



■ Once-timid disciples, living in the Spirit of Christ, told the story.



■ Those who heard, and whose hearts and minds were changed, were baptized into Christ and into his church.

■ Then God raised Jesus!

Death was shattered. A new day dawned, and Love lived again.

Alleluia!

■ Women wept.
Disciples deserted.
Earth trembled.
All was dark.
The way of love defeated.

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We are people of the story. This story makes us who we are.



Note: This pamphlet looks like a board game. You can make it one by enlarging and cutting out figures like these. Give the ends together to make a circle. Move the group on the journey, reading as you go. All will finish together. There are no winners or losers. It's all about Christ, grace, love, and community in the new world of God's abundant, steadfast mercy.

* **Love** has a special meaning in the Bible. Love is God's unconditional and never ending desire, work, and suffering for the good of all humans and all creation. Love is God's action to bring us into abundant life - reconciled to God, each other, and all creation... and loving as God loves.



Why an infant?
Isn't God's family for everybody?

■ The Spirit gathers us into CHURCH, the community of very human "saints/sinners" who are called to...

- worship
- love one another
- love the world.

■ In the new reality there are no...

- points or pointkeepers.
- big deals.
- people of greater value and people of lesser value.
- levels of importance based on achievement.

For freedom Christ has set us free. GAL 5:1

■ In our baptism (as infants, youth, or adults) God gave us new life and brought us into the community of Jesus. All was a gift of love - even the faith which grows out of God's unconditional acceptance.

■ In the new world of abundant grace we are free for **loving!**

■ a change so great it's like dying and rising.

■ a change so great it's like being born anew.

■ A question: Are there rules for this life?

No ... because it's all about love.

■ The greatest gift of baptism is our union with Christ. We now live **IN CHRIST.**

■ In baptism we were transferred from an old world, from an old reality to a new reality.



■ In a love relationship with God where we are forgiven, showered with grace, raised with Christ, born anew, justified, sustained by the Holy Spirit...

We respond by loving as we have been loved.

1 John 4:19

United to Christ we are **JUSTIFIED***. We are declared beloved children of God. This is our identity for life! We know who we are and whose we are.

Does God really love me and receive me just as I am? YES!

The two ways

You must do this!

1. We'll try.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

* "Justified" - to be validated, accepted, shown to be of great value, not because of our sincerity, achievements, or intentions, but because of Christ. Justification is a free gift received by faith. "Faith" = trusting God and God's promises.

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■ The crucified and risen Christ, present in all creation, is with us (the church) in two special ways...
Word and Sacrament.

■ 1. "Word" is the living Christ "addressing" us...

- through
 - the Bible
 - preaching
 - an event
 - the voice of a friend.

■ This living Word...
 • exposes us so we see our need, our stupidity, our self-centeredness.



• declares that the God of mercy loves us, forgives us, and raises us to new life.

Note: This declaration has no conditions. It is not based on what we do but on who God is,

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In sacraments God comes to us in the very ordinary.

■ We are **SENT** from Word and meal to live as followers of Christ ✕

■ The Holy Communion Meal
 After **ENTRY**, **WORD**, and **PRAYER**, we offer gifts, give **THANKS**, and then share the **MEAL** of bread and cup. The risen Christ is with us forgiving, healing, uniting, nourishing.

■ We gather for two sacraments
BAPTISM 
 (see discussion on p. 2) and
HOLY COMMUNION 

■ 2. "Sacrament" is a drama/event in the faith community which...
 • is commanded by Christ.
 • uses an earthly element.
 • is connected to a promise.

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■ In the love relationship we are **free**...

■ from the law, from keeping rules in order to be thought of as "good."

■ from perfectionism.
 Loved as we are, we do not have to strive to be perfect in order to be acceptable.

■ from fear of death.
 Eternally safe in God's arms, the power of death is shattered.

■ from absolutes.
 We need not always be right or unquestioning. Doubt and struggle are part of the life of trust.

■ from domination.
 In God's embrace we don't have to judge others so we look better. We don't have to be above others or control others to feel worthy.

■ from deception.
 We need not fake it. We can be honest about nation, culture, race, school, church, and ourselves. We are saints and sinners.

■ The meal also pictures the dream of God - a world of unity where all have enough, all share, and where all creation lives in peace.



The opposite is any way to be religious, spiritual, 'christian' without dying.

It is **Cruciform**, life in the shape of the cross

meaning a daily return to baptism, dying to the old self, rising to the new self, rising to love, to serve, to follow the way of the cross.

As people of the cross, living joyfully in creation, we ...
1. worship God with the family of faith.
2. pray.
3. love our neighbors, especially the lowly, vulnerable and outsider.
4. see work (student, nurse, plumber, etc.) and our family life (daughter, son, mother, etc.) as a calling from God to love and serve.

Note: These are not rules. They are ways that emerge when Christ's Spirit dwells in us. They are "what we do when we don't have to do anything."
Inspired by Gerhard Forde

What is the shape of the free life in Christ?

Now our life energy can be used to live joyfully in creation, loving God and serving the neighbor.
Now we can enter fully into life knowing there is forgiveness when we fail.

My sign is a reminder that sometimes the way of Christ's love is very clear, and often it is not. We need help - from our church family, pastors, Scriptures, prayer, good reasoning, and the wisdom of the past.



- 5. reject violence, forgiving our enemies and working for peace and reconciliation.
- 6. see our bodies, our sexuality, our talents, our gender as beautiful gifts to be used for the glory of God.
- 7. involve ourselves in the community, nation, and world for the good of all, not some (This is working for God's "justice").
- 8. release from our abundance money and things for the good of others, especially the poor and hungry.
- 9. say **YES** to creation, tenderly caring for it, seeing God in it, and responding with awe, wonder, and gratitude; and we say **NO** to all that would harm God's creation.
- 10. tell the story of God's love and invite others to share the journey.

You don't need points!

By grace we are **LIBERATED** from a tiresome and joyless religious life of earning points, keeping score, justifying ourselves, and looking good.
from Sin. Loving God, we are free from self-centeredness and idolatry. Idolatry is trusting anything other than God for worth and well being (youth, beauty, success, security, winning, cars, clothes, ideology, nation, popularity, status, wealth).

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Does this mean I don't have to buy all the right things to have worth and dignity?



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We also enjoy rest, parties, re-creation.



Neighbor means anyone in need.

■ In the midst of the joy, we humans and all of creation need continued mending. History witnesses to human frailty, futility, violence, stupidity, and the human need to be big deals, to be in control. How often we fail in our loving at the expense of each other and all creation.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

■ This is...

- abundant life.
- life as a great banquet.
- life lived in the extravagance of God's grace.
- partnership with God in loving the world.

■ Nevertheless, God does not give up on us. God meets us where we are...

- in our joy and sorrow.
- in our weakness and our failure.
- in the deepest reality of our lives — our pain, our suffering, and our death.

God in Christ meets us on the cross.

Here God is passionately involved. Here God shares our humanity.

Here God whispers...

ALLELUIA

■ When we near our death we will not cling to our good deeds, our points, or a triumphant self-confidence. We will remember our baptism and cling to a promise: "Nothing will separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

ROMANS 8:38-39



■ In this love is our hope. Here is the power to make us new. Here is the power that ushers in a whole new creation.

"I love you."

I'm getting it! The faith journey is not about moving to a higher spiritual level. It's about becoming more deeply human. Wow!



...and "human" comes from "humus" of the soil.

We give thanks to you, O God of love and mercy, for raising us to free and abundant life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Study Questions

Use these questions to prompt further conversation:

- ? 1** When do you first remember being aware of God's love?
 - ? 2** What do you know about your Baptism? How is your life different because of this event?
 - ? 3** If you were baptized as an infant, how would you respond if someone told you that you must "accept Jesus as your Savior" and be baptized as an adult?
 - ? 4** Some say they are closest to God when they are alone in nature. Why do we need church, Christian community, worship, Scripture, Baptism, and Holy Communion?
 - ? 5** Lutherans have a living way of seeing the Bible—God comes to us through Scripture with judgment and grace. Was there a time in your life when God encountered you through the Bible? You may also share a time when God encountered you through a sermon, a hymn, Holy Communion, a relationship, or an event.
 - ? 6** The following seven boxes tell about common bondages. Which is most likely to seduce you? Which bondage prevails in the society that surrounds you?
 - ? 7** What is the difference between the Christian life as "What I must do and what I must not do" and "What I am free from and what I am free for"?
 - ? 8** From among the ten freedoms listed, which one is very special to you?
 - ? 9** How can you tell the story (your story and God's story)? Also, how do you invite others to join the journey?
 - ? 10** How does God meet you in your joy and in your sorrow?
 - ? 11** What are your reasons for ALLELUIA, for praising God?
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