

1 John 2:15-17

October 27, 2013 – PENTECOST 23, Saint Croix LHS Sunday 4 of 4¹

STRONG to Serve in LOVE

✦ **View life forwards to the Father. (vv.15-16)**

✦ **Live life backwards by His will. (v.17)**

“God sends his love and his faithfulness” (Psalm 57:3), dear loved ones of God:

In my home congregation we needed to build a teacherage. One member, a contractor, was going to teach us all how to lay block. That’s when I discovered I’m not a brick layer. Fifteen minutes on one block and still come up crooked. None of us had that skill. Five courses up one long wall was 2” too short and a short wall was 4” too long. It took some wide gaps and scrunchy mortar joints to square everything up for the base plate. Why did we try so hard? **LOVE** for Christian education. We wanted to provide for our called workers. We gave what we had, and God blessed it.

Now imagine three professional brick layers all asked a question: “What are you doing?” Surly Sam answers, “What’s it look like? I’m laying bricks!” Mellow Melvin replies, “I’m building a wall.” Glorious George tops them all: “I’m constructing a cathedral!” Same job, different goal. What’s yours?

Are you texting and driving? Running a nonstop treadmill? It’s easy to lose the big picture in a pile of work. If our kids were only mind and body, any school would do. But for soul and spirit we need God’s Word in the classroom. Our area high schools can train sanctified laity to carry water and mix mortar. But to train the brick layers on God’s “cathedral” we need preparatory schools for called workers. Paul wrote, *“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation like a master builder.”* (1 Corinthians 3:10) How about you? What’s your task? God wants us: **STRONG to serve in LOVE**. We need to...

✦ **View life forwards to the Father. (vv.15-16)**

Most of us live by trial and error. My home congregation got the teacherage built because my Granddad’s hired man knew how to straighten out the block walls for a solid foundation. But ask our engineers why not everyone builds bridges, and you’ll get a lesson in reality. Trial and error cost lives. Likewise, where you and I spend eternity, trials will not correct the error of taking the wrong road.

God didn’t send His hired man. He sent His Son Jesus to suffer all our trials and pay for all our violations. Every broken bridge and sagging wall of our sin, every block cocked despite our best efforts, Christ fixed it all. *“Behold! I am making everything new!”* (Revelation 21:5) His cross stands as the testament to God’s great love for us. His empty tomb shouts His triumph over death itself. His Word says your Baptism wraps you up in Christ’s victory. Through God’s Word His sun of righteousness shines for you to **View life forwards to the Father**. He builds your life to bring you home to glory.

Last spring I met a man who makes his living building replicas of early English hand planes. His wife told me how he hated his office job, doing the same thing day after day with nothing tangible to show for it. Now he “loves” his hand planes; is he wrong? What about the pastor who reported on his China trip using an iPad: “Loved, loved, loved it!” God says, *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, he does not love the Father.”* (NETNT) Are we all in trouble?

By nature, yes! John warns: *“For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting about what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.”* Who of us does not want to feel good about ourselves? Sometimes you try shortcuts to happiness, buying things, eating, drinking – good things at first. But cravings easily become addictions to alcohol, drugs, gambling. The more you get, the more you want. Lust is never satisfied. We all want to feel loved. God created us with natural desires for intimacy. But our eyes wander, our hearts follow.

¹ “STRONG to serve” ministry initiative of Saint Croix Lutheran High School – Sunday 2 of 4 at New Life.

Adultery, ruined marriages, prostitution, pornography can assault our hearts like sexually transmitted diseases. Empty promises, no fulfillment, just more broken hearts all around – without a clear **View of life forwards to the Father**. Our natural desires for praise get the best of us. God gives so many gifts we have a problem. God cannot tolerate bragging, and we cannot keep from doing it. The world thinks bragging is normal, but God condemns it. One commentator said, “The sin within drives us to be too impatient to let other people figure out our good features at their own speed. So we hasten the process with boasting, forgetting that all our possessions and even our skills are gifts of God. Boasting denies God’s gifts, insults the giver, and inflates the braggart with nothing but self-aggrandizing gas.”²

This is why that famous passage from John’s Gospel is so amazing. Love for this sinful world attracts us like ants on poison syrup. But “**God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.**” (John 3:16) Our love for the world destroys us. God’s love for the world saved us and all people on His treasured planet. Because Jesus had a clear **View of life forwards to the Father**, He could help us learn to...

✦ **Live life backwards by His will. (v.17)**

Hollywood catches human passion here. How many movies show someone coming back to undo the damage of the first time around? “Do-overs” fuel reincarnation theories as if we’ll get it right if we just keep trying. But God says, “**Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**” (Hebrews 9:27–28 NIV84) Instead of making us suffer life all over again, God saved us. He gives us His Word to **Live life backwards by His will**.

It’s like seeing the problems on our block wall to fix them first. Experience teaches that. So we get to experience God’s work in the lives of countless believers in the Holy Scriptures. Noah preached a hundred years to a dead audience, so you don’t have to give up when loved ones don’t listen at first. Moses let his anger get the best of him and lost the Promised Land, so you and I can learn self control on our way to the heavenly Promised Land. Jesus had His Judas and even a denying disciple like Peter, so we can learn from Jesus what real love means. He never gave up on us. We won’t give up on each other.

“**The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**” “**Without faith it is impossible to please God.**” (Hebrews 11:6) “**We regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**” (2 Corinthians 5:16f) Now we are in the world, but not of the world. “**Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Someday in heaven a young man from China may walk up to you or a young woman from Vietnam, pure love and gratitude shining in their eyes. “Thank-you so much for supporting the ministry at St. Croix Lutheran High School! My grandpa went there and learned about Jesus our Savior. He told my dad and my dad told me. Now I get to enjoy heaven forever!” What would change in our lives now if we could flash back from then? How differently would I spend my time and money if I could always **View life forwards to the Father and Live life backwards by His will**? Every class, every task would be different if we were not just “laying bricks,” but always “building the cathedral” of glory to God.

We were asked for seven St. Croix Sundays. One would work if all our members could be present any given Sunday. Too many ministry requests? I follow my professors’ advice and leave it to God to guide you as He powers faith-born love by Word and sacraments. God, the Master Builder, says, “**You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**” (1 Peter 2:5 NIV84) He makes us **Strong to Serve in LOVE**. Was it worth four Sundays to encourage your prayers and participation in this ministry initiative at St. Croix? One smiling face in heaven is all it will take. Yours and so many others with Jesus! Amen.

² Jeske, M. A. (2002). *James, Peter, John, Jude* (p. 221f). NPH. (800-662-6022) Hear Jeske at <http://www.timeofgrace.org>.
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