



President Walton's February 2019 Message

Living in Love



The FLGA District, LCMS

I was truly amazed to walk into Walmart the week after Christmas expecting to see all kinds of after Christmas clearance merchandise only to find that like Christmas decorations around our neighborhood, they had all been put away. In its place I was greeted by mountains of red and pink hearts, candies and everything Valentine's Day—still in December! I honestly can't remember as a child that Valentine's Day was such a retail holiday. Sure there was candy, cards and flowers, maybe even a jewelry store advertising something special, but in recent years it has become a commercial venture rivaling Christmas or Mother's Day!

As most already know, Valentine's Day had a very different beginning than what we know it to be today. St Valentine's story really flows from the love of Jesus and it's not really all that romantic. In fact, Valentine was a martyr, killed because, as a Roman Priest in the 3rd Century, he was bold enough to live in love and serve God's people, even when it endangered his life. In a day of rampant promiscuity Valentine stood firm that marriage was between one man and one woman. I guess Solomon in all his wisdom was right—there is nothing new under the sun!

History tells us that because Valentine would not heed the edict of Claudius (who forbid marriage because he felt it distracted his soldiers from their duty) he was imprisoned. One of the men who was to judge him under Roman law was a man called Asterius, whose daughter was blind. Tradition says that Valentine, always a servant of Christ, prayed with Asterius and the young girl was healed. It made such an impact that Asterius himself became a Christian.

In the year 269 AD, Valentine was sentenced to a three-part execution of a beating, stoning, and finally decapitation all because of his stand for Christian marriage. The story goes that the last words he wrote were in a note to Asterius' daughter, now able to see and read them. He inspired today's romantic missives by signing it, "from your Valentine." It was far from what we might consider a romantic love.

During this season of Epiphany, when we celebrate the light of Jesus, many can only see the darkness of sin's grip on humanity, and it can leave us feeling hopeless. It certainly can be difficult to live in love. The Apostle Paul reminds us: ***"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*** (Ro 5:20-21).

You and I have received this grace. It's what our Lutheran Church has been built on for over 500 years. Paul tells us, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** (Eph 2:8-10). This is the gift of God's love to us in Jesus. We have received the forgiveness of all our sins, not because of our own worth or merit, not because we somehow earned or deserved it, but solely through the shed blood of Jesus, who bore the Cross in our place to show us the depth of His love. He now calls each of us, as those who have received His grace, to share it freely with the world around us—a world in desperate need of real love.

What if Valentine's Day was more than just an opportunity to show affection to those we already love, and we used it as an opportunity to share the love of Jesus with those wandering in the darkness of their sin. My suspicion is that we wouldn't have to look too far. It may be your child or parent; it may be a co-worker or friend. Who do you have in your life that needs to know the love of Jesus? Perhaps the better question is, "who do you have in your life that *doesn't* need to know the love of Jesus?" There are people all around us, probably people we even know, possibly even people we worship beside on Sunday, who fear the darkness and feel unloved—unloved by God and unloved by others. Often all it takes is us stopping and taking the time to really *see* the ones with whom we need to share the love of Jesus. They just may be right in front of you, hoping and longing for someone to care.

The love of Jesus is transformational. Think back to the first time you knew and understood and experienced the real love of Jesus. Many years ago I had a church member who had lived a very rough life totally disconnected from God. He was a recovering alcoholic, who had been to the very depths of hell. His first child, a daughter, was out of wedlock, and he fled. When he finally came back he married the mother, and they had another child, a son. The marriage was always a challenge, and when the son was a teenager, he overdosed on drugs and died. It was the last straw for their marriage, and they soon divorced. Shortly after that the wife committed suicide in her grief. My friend felt as if it were all his fault, and he turned to alcohol to soothe himself. He was homeless and helpless, living on the streets for years when someone finally reached out to him and helped him get into AA. As he was getting back on his feet, now in his 60s, he wandered into our Lutheran church because he had grown up Lutheran. Can you imagine walking into a church all by yourself not knowing anyone, feeling as if God would never want you back?

The members embraced him, even when they learned about his past. He became an active part of the parish, and wanted to do whatever he could to serve. He was active in Bible Study, and had an eagerness to learn. Many times he would call or stop by to ask questions about faith and life. A couple of years later he was reading the lessons on Palm Sunday. As he began reading the long Gospel reading, and got to the suffering of Jesus, this tough old guy began to weep in front of the whole congregation. Later he would tell me that he recognized, for maybe the first time, that his sin caused the suffering of Jesus. There was not a dry eye in the house. We all experienced the touch of Jesus' love in a very visible way that day. It still brings a tear to my eye whenever I think of it. This was the love that motivated Valentine to act, and it is our motivation too!

I know that love. I have personally experienced it. It is why I responded to God's call to become a pastor. I wanted others to know and experience the love of Jesus. It's a very unique love. I am blessed to be married to a wonderful woman! I love Edith with all my heart, and will no doubt bring home some flowers on Valentine's Day. As much as I love her, and know she loves me, there is One that loves me more. I am confident of Jesus' love for me, a love that continually brings me out of darkness into light. This is what motivates my heart for mission. This is why I am passionate for us as a District to start two new ministries in each region each year for the next five years. Every day we encounter people that walk in darkness, looking for love, often in the wrong places. We have something life-changing to offer them in Jesus.

Our world seems conditioned to see Valentine's Day as a day of love. This Valentine's Day why not show the people around you the real love that flows from the very heart of Jesus? Jesus told us that all people would be able to tell we are His disciples by the way we love each other. Flowers fade, and candy will be eaten and it's gone, but the love of Jesus lives on eternally. When you share His love with another not only could you make their day, but Jesus may use you to bless their eternity.

The Apostle John told the Church, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*” (1 Jn 4:7). This is not only God’s command, but it is now our privilege. Oh, how He loves you and me! May every day be Valentine’s Day where we open our eyes to see, and share the transformational love that connects people to Jesus and touches the world all around us!

In His Love,

Greg



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Florida-Georgia District, LCMS

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- [FLGA District School Music Festival](#)
- [Veterans of the Cross Retreat](#)
- [National Youth Gathering](#)
- [LCMS Synod Convention](#)