Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

As I was contemplating the word of the Lord before us and thinking about how to best drive home the lesson for our souls’ sakes, I had a question pop into my head that intrigued me. The question was this: “In the world, what is the most dangerous sin?” As we proceed with this sermon, I think you will grasp why that particular question arose.

To answer my question, I thought I would turn to Luther. Were you aware of the fact that 2017 is the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation? 500 years ago, this October was the day that Martin Luther posted the 95 Thesis in an attempt to get his fellow scholars to debate his growing fear that his church was terribly misusing the Word of God and the wonder of Christ. That simple act of posting the 95 Thesis brought about a great deal of change, not just to the Church but even to the world. So I determined that perhaps hearing from Luther when we can would be good.

So how might Luther have answered my question? I turned to Ewald Plass’ anthology What Luther Says. I think the words I found are right on point and awesome. First quote is from quote 2340.

*“The notion of being able to achieve one’s own righteousness is the cesspool of all evils and the very worst sin of the world. For gross sins and vices are recognized and can, therefore, be corrected or at least checked by the punishment of state authorities. But this sin (the notion of every man about his own righteousness) does not only not want to be sin but even poses as the very height of religion and righteousness. That is why this pestiferous notion reflects the height and the greatness of the devil’s power throughout the entire world. It is truly the head of the serpent and the snare by which the devil captures and holds captive all men, for all people by nature think that the Law justifies.”*

In a nutshell, Luther says that he thinks that the greatest sin is that we think we are going to save ourselves, that we think we aren’t that bad or that somehow our own goodness or the fact that we “try our best” is the magic formula that is going to get us into heaven. And I will tell you I agree with Luther on this point. Our own worst enemy in the battle of faith is ourselves. Saddest to me, is that today, most people don’t even care about the issues of heaven and hell, being convinced that God is just a figment of our imagination and only a needed psychological tool for the uneducated and ignorant. That thought then leads me to my second quote from Luther. Here again, he speaks to what he considers the “sin.” This is quote 1734 in Plass.

*“I do not now eye so anxiously the avarice of the peasants and the fornication and unchasteness which prevail everywhere as I must eye with anxiety the* ***contempt for the Gospel****. Avarice, fornication, and unchasteness are no doubt gross, terrible sins; and our Lord God punishes them, too, with pestilence and famine. But at least the country and its people continue to exist despite these visitations. But despising, ridiculing, and mocking the great grace of God’s fatherly visitation in this way outranks the sin of adultery and fornication. Indeed, it is not even a human but a devilish sin. And punishment will surely follow upon a sin such as this; and the penal decree will be: Sweep everything away!”*

Luther’s thoughts there are a wonder. As he looks about his world, he sees the multitude of the sins of the people and yet, he views the greatest sin to be: **“Contempt for the Gospel.”** The world just doesn’t see the need for Jesus and the sacrifice he has made for the world. Actually, if you think about it, you realize that the first and second quotes go hand in hand. When you think you can save yourself…when you think your goodness good enough or maybe not that bad, then in truth you don’t really have a need for Jesus do you? In essence both quotes really deal with the two different sides of the greatest sin. Contempt for the Law and contempt for the Gospel!

Is it possible that this is a danger to you? Let’s explore the words of our text under the theme: **CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY!**

Did you catch the words here that are of the Law? If you didn’t, then perhaps that is because you don’t really get what you should. Go back and reread those verses and notice such words like: **“powerless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies.”** Each one of those words deserves a closer look.

Who are the powerless? The Holy Spirit says “we” are, we are the powerless…**”when we were still powerless,”** is the full phrase used here. Powerless! That word can also be translated: unable, morally weak, helpless condition, or weak. Ask those who have been laid up for a long time and need extensive physical therapy to help you with this word. We could apply it here like this: God’s Law says you are to walk to the end of the hallway and that hallway is 80 foot long. But you, you can’t even sit up by yourself. You are powerless. You know what you are to do but you don’t have any chance at all of getting where you need to be. I know, you say, “I’ll work on it!” Sorry, God’s Law says, “Get there now!” This isn’t a person here or there, this is God’s description of all of us. All of us are “powerless” when it comes to our eternal life and salvation.

Or take another of those words: sinners (yes, I know I have skipped one for now, just be patient!). Notice the plural! That’s us again. **“While we were still sinners.”** A sinner is one who disobeys the commands of God either his command to do this or his command to not do this! This is the word that means “you missed the mark.” There is a target out there that we are to hit. The real goal is the bullseye but if you want we can speak of the whole target as your goal. Every arrow you shoot goes far off the mark. Misses the whole thing. Misses and that arrow is lost. Misses by a mile! Are you going to argue about how close you came? Sorry, God says, “Hit the target!” and you don’t leave an arrow or even a scrape anywhere on that target. You are a sinner!

How bout that next word: enemy. Oh, we get that word, don’t we? We understand the nature of the enemy. The word is directly derived from the word for hate. An enemy is our hater! But in this case, we are the enemies! We are **“God’s enemies!”** Haters of God! This was and is our state of existence if we do not have and keep the call and faith that the Lord our God has given us! The enemy’s only goal is to conquer, destroy, to get the object hated away from them. That’s us! That is our natural state when it comes down to God.

Oh yeah, now that word we skipped: ungodly. We like to pretend that isn’t us. We tend to think that this word means: “those who are not moral or as good as us!” Wrong! Basically it is a word that means “not god.” If you are not a god, not divine and holy then this word refers to you. You do realize that this means that Adam and Eve before they sinned were divine and holy! That’s right, they had the very “image of God.” Yet they were deceived into throwing that away and as a result every single person who is only human is “ungodly!”

Do you know why we looked at these words? Because this is exactly what God’s Law declares of us. The Law wasn’t given to us so we could see how good we could be but rather so we could understand our sinful nature. We are totally, absolutely, completely, without doubt and utterly sinful. We do not measure up to the Lord our God in any way. On our own, we are exactly what these words declare: powerless, ungodly, sinners and enemies of God! Now if you understand this, then you need to realize that once you decide that you are not that bad, that these things do not apply to you or that Pastor is once again over exaggerating the problem then you are truly and absolutely in contempt of the Law! And if you are going to reject the Law of God with its reality, then realize that in truth you have rejected the truth of God himself, yes, rejected God! That sounds serious doesn’t it?

But here’s where it all gets changed. It all gets changed because of the Gospel of Jesus. Here are the phrases in this section that address the gospel and what it is about: **“Christ died for the ungodly, Christ died for us, saved from God’s wrath through him, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life…we have now received reconciliation.”** Gospel phrases. Now at this moment, let me get something said that absolutely irritates me and just needs to be said.

When it comes to the Gospel, the Gospel is the very specific message that God’s Son Jesus died for your sins and because of what Jesus has done you have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life! That’s it! Do not add things about what must be done in Jesus’ name or how you must live or how you must give your ten percent or anything that says you must now prove your faith or show your faith in order to be saved! Because the moment you add a “you must do this or that” to the Gospel you have made the Gospel into the Law! And you, we, cannot measure up to the perfection that God demands!

Now be careful here, because this is not a license to do whatever you want. God plainly reveals in his Word that once we have the gift of faith that faith will and does show itself in our lives…not because we have to but because we cannot help ourselves! God’s Holy Spirit moves me to hate sin and have the greatest desire to live a life pleasing to God. That’s where all of God’s children are at…they hate sin and desire to please God.

But honestly, we can’t! We stumble, fall, sin and disobey the Lord almost all the time and every time we do we repent and cling to the message of Jesus that He died for our sins and was raised to life so we know that God will and does forgive our lives. So, there is a battle going on, in us and around us. When you no longer care about the battle, you might have a faith problem. When you no longer care that you miss more church than you attend, that might be a faith problem. When you declare that you can live any immoral life you want despising God’s moral Law, then I will assure you that you have a faith problem. You need the Lord to once again pour His Holy Spirit on you and grant you the gift of faith so you walk away from your sins…walk away, stop them, be sorry for them, want to do what is right and pleasing to God…that’s the whole issue of repentance! Then we might once again speak of your faith. But please, don’t confuse Law and Gospel! The Gospel is God’s declaration to you!

That declaration of God says that in Jesus and through Jesus you have been reconciled to God. Jesus died for you! He lived the perfect life you could not, went to the cross and there paid for each and every sin of humankind. The sins of thought, word and deed were paid for and forgiven by Jesus. Jesus did this without any merit on our part, without any help from us or without attaching any conditions on us. Jesus died for us and Jesus rose from the dead to declare us reconciled and justified. That means we are forgiven because God says so. We are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Let’s just clarify a bit more.

To be justified means that we are in God’s courtroom, the evidence against us has been presented and it is clear we are criminals and as guilty as could be! But God our Father, for Jesus’ sake declares, He pronounces, us innocent of all charges! Not a single sin stands against us just because of Jesus. All of this because of and through Jesus.

And that’s where the word “reconcile” comes in. This word means that there has been a change of status before God for us. This change of status comes only in and through Jesus and what He has done. Reject the death of Jesus you lose reconciliation. Reject the resurrection of Jesus you lose reconciliation. Reject God’s Word and you lose reconciliation. We are reconciled only because of Jesus. Let me put it this way. When we are before the Father, the Father needs to look at us with His Jesus glasses on. Those glasses represent the faith God has given us in the Holy Spirit. But if you lost those glasses, if you decide you don’t need those glasses, then you will have a problem. When God looks at you through Jesus, you are forgiven fully and forever and given the gift of eternal life. When God doesn’t have those glasses of Jesus, you are fully and forever going to hell. That is how justify and reconcile work together.

God has justified and reconciled us in Jesus. We are saved and have only the wonders and marvels of eternal life awaiting us. It is all in Jesus. Don’t have contempt for the Law. Don’t have contempt for the Gospel. Don’t think it is about you! It is about Jesus. His wonder and salvation that God accomplished at just the right time. God thank you for Jesus! Amen.