

## LWML Sunday

Why are you here today? With all of the ways you could have spent your time this morning, what motivated you to come to church? I'm guessing that part of the reason is the people. You know there are people here with a heart like yours, and there are people here with a heart for you.

On your bulletin cover is a heart. It is the logo for the LWML – the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. They sponsor mission efforts around the world. They do this with their mites, small offerings that together help more and more people learn the Good News about Jesus.

Think about a heart in a hand. Literally, think about holding a real human heart in your hand. That's what a transplant surgeon does. He takes out the diseased heart with his hand and puts in a new heart. That's what God has done for you and me.

Do you see the cross and the drop of water in the logo? You know what the cross represents – Jesus dying for the forgiveness of our sins. And what does the drop of water represent? If you don't know, you can probably guess: Baptism. Baptism gives you a new heart, a pure heart with all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection.

Long ago God had promised in the prophet Ezekiel, "*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you,*" (Ezekiel 36:26). God has kept His promise. And unlike a physical transplant that lasts a number of years, the new heart God gives you through Baptism will live forever.

Why did God give you and me this "transplant?" Because I have within my heart thoughts and feelings, ideas, and urges

that are sinful. Your heart is not much different. My heart is not pure and neither is yours. We are born with original sin, inherited from our parents, and all the way back to Adam and Eve. And we daily commit actual sins. This sin in us will continue until the day you die.

The wonderful mystery of Baptism is that even though this bad news of sin is true, it is also true that we have here-and-now the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. He also gives us grace to live new and holy lives. St. Paul says, *We were buried ... with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life* (Romans 6:4). St. Peter describes it as a new birth. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3). Baptism is your daily death and new birth. When a surgeon transplants a human heart, new physical life comes to a fatally ill patient. In baptism God has given you a new heart, a pure heart, and newness of life which shows itself by loving others.

Peter writes in chapter 1: *Love one another earnestly from a pure heart* (1 Peter 1:22). We can do that! Now that the cross of Jesus has come into our hearts through Baptism, we can love one another. This is depicted in the LWML logo. The cross comes through Baptism into our hearts. And each new, purified heart is surrounded by a much bigger heart. That's the church, a big-hearted place, where all our hearts are together in His hand.

That's one of the reasons you are here this morning. As we have learned during the Covid crisis, it is possible to hear the

Word of God over the internet. But is not the same as being together around the Word. Together we receive this transforming Word as we hear it, spoken and sung, and as we receive it physically in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. There are various reasons we come to church, but more than anything else, we come to worship because here all our hearts are together, not only together with one another, but most importantly, together with one another in His hand.

We get together for other things. Some of you gather at Camp Courageous Garage Sale to serve there. Some are in veteran's organizations. Others gather at card clubs, car club, or at a fitness club. The young among us get together at school, 4-H, and on sports teams. Those things are all well and good, but isn't there something different about being together here, gathering as the baptized to hear God's Word and receive Jesus' body and blood in the Holy Communion? This is what's unique about our coming together each week in worship. It's here that God comes through His Means of Grace to make us a big-hearted fellowship filled with His love. And that is a compelling reason we come to church.

And it is the reason we love those outside the church. Jesus is not content to hold only us in His hand. He reaches His hand out to others. When a leper met Jesus and begged to be healed, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him (Mark 1:41). When Jairus's daughter died, Jesus took her "by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise'" and she had new life (Mark 5:41). When Peter tried to walk to Jesus on the water, he got scared and began to sink. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him (Matthew 14:31). *And [Jesus] took [the little children] in*

*his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them* (Mark 10:16).

Today He reaches out His hand through you and me to people who don't yet know His love, to people who still have spiritually diseased hearts. It's good that you are in organizations outside of the church. It's good because you have good news for people who have struggles, hurts, hopes, and joys, but who don't know Jesus. You're there because you have a heart, a new heart in His hand that is reaching out to others.

In your bulletin you have an insert that has on it LWML pledge. Please take it out. The pledge reminds us why we come to worship and why our hearts are in His hand to reach out to others. Our motivation is this: "In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption." And since He has put our hearts in His hand, we take His outgoing love to all people. Let's read the Pledge together:

**In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.**

As you go about your life this week, keep this picture in your mind: the forgiveness of Christ that comes into our hearts and lives through baptism, the coming together of God's people in worship, and that of God extending His love to everyone through you. Amen.