



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 19

October 3, 2021

Love One Another from Pure Hearts*

1 Peter 1:22

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Why are you here? Now, I don't mean to ask the great ontological question concerning the meaning of existence; I simply want to ask you: Why did you come to church today? What motivated you to be here?

Last weekend, the seventh and eighth grade confirmands and I attended church in Fort Wayne at the end of our Confirmation Retreat at the Seminary. This was no big deal for me, because I knew at least a dozen people there – men I attended Seminary with and others I remembered from my days of living in Fort Wayne. But, seated behind us was an elderly couple who were visitors that day. We greeted each other, talked for a bit, and then went on our way.

Now, even though I'm not a member there and I don't attend there regularly, my experience at that church was vastly different than that of the elderly couple. If I were in their shoes, I think I would find it hard to walk into an unfamiliar church . . . unless. Unless I knew someone in that church, someone I respect, someone who has heart; then it might be a different story. I might let my defenses down and maybe, just maybe, I'd be open to a spiritual conversation and perhaps an invitation to visit that church again. So, back to my original question: What motivated *you* to come to our church today? I think that part of the answer is the people, *our* people, *you*.

This is LWML weekend. "LWML" stands for the "Lutheran Women's Missionary League." The LWML is an auxiliary of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and has members throughout North America. As the word "missionary" in their name suggests, they sponsor mission efforts reaching around the globe. They do that with their mites – small offerings that together help more and more people learn the Good News of Jesus. For this LWML celebration, I'd like us to think about 1 Pet. 1:22: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart."

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. You can picture today's sermon by looking at the logo for LWML Sunday on the front of today's order of worship. "Our Hearts in HIS Hand."

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



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 19

October 3, 2021

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 I'm sure you've already guessed what the drop of water represents: Baptism. It's baptism that gives you a new heart, a pure heart with all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. Long ago God promised through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezk. 36:26). Well, He kept His promise. Unlike a physical transplant that lasts a number of years, the new heart God gives through Baptism will live forever.

But why? Why did God give you and me this "transplant?" Here's why: I have within my heart thoughts, feelings, ideas, urges that are sinful. If some of my deepest thoughts and desires ever became public, I'd be so ashamed I'd hightail it out of town. And so would you. Because you have things deep down in your heart that would shame you if others knew. My heart by nature is not pure and neither is yours. We're born with original sin, inherited from the sinners before us, all the way back to Adam and Eve, and we daily bear the fruit of that sinful nature by committing actual sins. Sooner or later, what's deep down is going to be known. "No creature is hidden from [God's] sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). This sin in us will continue to plague us until the day we die. But after that, no more sinning. When you die, your sinning comes to an end.

That's part of the great mystery of baptism. Baptism brings us the forgiveness of Jesus Christ here-and-now and gives us grace to live new and holy lives here-and-now. St. Paul says, We were buried . . . with [Christ] 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 (Rom. 6:4). 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 Pet. 1:3). Mysteriously, baptism is your daily death and new birth. When a surgeon transplants a human heart, new physical life comes to a fatally ill patient. God has mysteriously given you a new heart, a pure heart, and with it newness of life . . . and with that life God gives you His love.

"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1 Pet. 1:22). I need to say a couple of things here. "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth" sounds like you have made yourself pure by keeping the commandments. But that's not what Peter means. He's simply talking about faith. Our new heart, our new birth, makes us "children of the heavenly Father" who trustingly look up to Him and want to live holy lives for His sake. Being pure before God is not our doing, it's the gift of grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). My second point is this: When Peter says faith is for a "sincere brotherly love," he's not excluding women. In the New Testament, the word "brother" often means both men and women who believe in Jesus. You could paraphrase it this way: Now that the cross of Jesus has come into your hearts through baptism, love one another. Once again, the logo



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 19

October 3, 2021

shows it so well. The cross comes into your heart, my heart, each of our hearts through baptism. 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.

Earlier, I asked what motivates you to come to church. Part of the answer is the people: you, me, all of us together. As we experienced during the Covid crisis, we can hear the Word of God over the internet, but being together, in person around the Word – *that's* the truest reason to come to church. Together with one another, God gives us His Word, His Word of new birth, of life and love in Christ. 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 as many reasons to come to church as there are people who 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.

And when you look at it that way, there's something about worship that's different from any of the other groups or associations you have during the week. Maybe you belong to an organization like Kiwanis or Rotary. Maybe you're part of a veterans' organization. Maybe you belong to a country club or a fitness club. Maybe you just like to hang out with friends. That's all well and good, but isn't there, shouldn't there be, something different about being together *here*, something uniquely special about fellowship with other members of the body of Christ, gathering as the baptized to hear God's Word and receive Jesus' body and blood in 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. That's how we "love one another earnestly from a pure heart." And that, I think, is *the* compelling reason to come to church.

Of course, we love those outside the church, too. Jesus isn't content to hold only *us* in His hand. He reaches His hand out to everyone. 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 cumi,' 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 (Matt. 14:31). And He 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 life and love, to people who still have spiritually diseased hearts and desperately need the new heart Jesus gives. Remember when I mentioned organizations outside the church, like civic organizations, veterans' groups, and so on? It's good when you're involved in those – because you have an invitation to extend to people who have their struggles, their hurts, their hopes, their 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 them.

Martin Luther once asked: "Then what is a pure heart? A 'pure heart' is one that's



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 19

October 3, 2021

watching and pondering what God says and replacing its ideas with the Word of God. This alone is pure before God, yes, purity itself, which purifies everything that it includes and touches. Therefore, though a common laborer, a shoemaker, or a blacksmith, may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he's covered with dirt, pitch, [and sweat,] still he may sit at home and think: 'My God has made me a man. He's given me my house, my wife, my child, and has commanded me to love them and to support them with my work.' Note that he's pondering the Word of God in his heart . . . If he attains the highest purity so that he also takes hold of the Gospel and believes in Christ — without this, that purity is impossible — then he is pure completely, inwardly in his heart toward God and outwardly toward everything under him on earth." **

I pray that describes each of us. Members of the LWML, Lutheran Women in Mission, thank you for your example and your encouragement. I hope we will all take this logo home to remember the transformation that forgiveness has brought into our hearts and lives through Baptism. Coming together in worship, God makes us a big-hearted church that extends His hand of love to everyone. "Above all, keep loving each other earnestly" (1 Pet. 4:8). In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

* Based on a sermon by The Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer

** Luther, M. (1999, c1956). Vol. 21: Luther's works, vol. 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (21:33). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.