**[1]** November 17, 2024
Sermon Title: Week #3, “Faithful Living”
Scripture: 2 Cor. 5:1-5, 16-21
Theme: The love of Christ is resoundingly abundant and recursively redundant!

**[2]** In our first sermon of the stewardship series, we learned from Paul, that the God of all Comfort works through Christ Jesus to not only share in our suffering, but also in our abundant hope and comfort. In our second stewardship sermon, we spoke of joining in the forgiveness of others, Paul saying, if you as the beloved community forgive him/her, I will also forgive. . Today, we speak of faithful living, comporting ourselves as ones who are faithful to God and to Christ Jesus, a beloved community of faith. Together, these are the stewardship of consolation, the stewardship of forgiveness, and the stewardship of faithful living. In all three, Paul defends his authority to speak, declaring that his weakness is his authority, not his beauty or perfection, and that even though death is at work in him, life is at work in him also, the Body of Christ, as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, because God has given us these gifts of eternal treasure in earthen vessels or clay jars.

Love compels us (5:14), says Paul, to not only believe in, but also to live out, our faith. It is Righteousness, declares Paul, that comes by faith from start to finish, and, as it is written, “the righteous will live by faith!” (Rm. 1:17). This is not a faith that comes by what we can see, but one that comes by what we cannot see. Would that I could leave this world now and be in the presence of Jesus, says Paul. Would that I could be at home with the Lord now. But, it is not yet
to be, and while we are absent from the sight of Jesus, we are yet at home through faith, without sight. Love compels us, says Paul, to live by faith!

The Love of Christ urges us on! It encourages us to want more, to do more, to be more. In the Love of Christ, we are not satisfied with a status quo for humanity. Paul puts it this way, “we groan under our burden, not because we wish to be unclothed of our bodies, but because we wish to be further clothed by our heavenly ones.” (5:4). The verb “groan” (*stenázō*) in this context means the groan of one giving birth (with the pressure of being exerted forward). And if truth be known, says Paul, “when we have been unclothed of our earthly tents, which are our human bodies, we will not be found naked.” (5:3).

**[3]** Paul’s tent metaphor is important in understanding this point about the requirements of love. When we bet the house, when we bet the farm, on the Love of Christ, on our faith in God, there is no way we can lose! We can only win. We have no need for a hedge on our faith. It is not a matter of playing it safe! All ways lead to a win. Once we commit to our faith, by letting go of our need for control, we will never be found naked. Our fears of losing what we have in this world by letting go of it is simply wrong-headed. We find our sound minds, our right minds, by sinking into the garment of Christ, the garment of active love. “We do not boast, says Paul, as our opponents in Corinth do—boasting in their outward appearance, but we boast in our hearts.” (5:12).

**[4]** Even though we are out of the sight of the Lord, clothed in our earthly tents, we still have a home in Christ. The Spirit is a guarantee from God that when our earthly tents are taken down and folded up at death, we will be housed under a heavenly tent not made by human hands, clothed by a spiritual body. That which is subject to death *(thnētós)*, our mortal bodies, will be swallowed up by life (5:4). Life will consume Death, drinking it down completely until it is no more! Death will have NO sting; the Grave will have NO victory! (1 Cor. 15:55). Paul speaks of a coming tribunal before Christ (*béma)*, where what we have done in our earthly bodies will be revealed, and we will receive back *(komizó)* what we have dealt out, whether good or evil. We often think of judgment as a punishment for evil, but not a reward for good. But, the words of Paul are clear in verse 10, “whether good or evil.” (5:10). He is even more clear in his Letter to the Romans (5:15): “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man (Adam), how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many!”  It all hinges on this, says Paul, “that we no longer live for ourselves, but we now live for Christ Jesus.” We have surrendered the control of what we have, from a human point of view, to take up what we do not yet have, from a heavenly point of view. When we live for Christ, our sole and primary goal is to please the Lord. When anyone is in Christ, living for Christ, that person is a new creation, no longer self-controlled, but Christ-controlled, and constrained by love. Paul goes on to say: “No trespass whatsoever will be counted against that person (5:19).”

**[5]** The grace of God is resoundingly abundant and recursively redundant in Christ’s love. The love of Christ is never used up, never consumed completely, always alive, always relevant. When we live and act on the love of Christ, our attitude toward others is changed. We no longer consider Christ from a human point of view. We no longer consider others from a human point of view. We no longer consider anyone from a human point of view, or according to the flesh, as some translations interpret it. Instead, we view others from the eternal side of the fence. We treat others as if we were treating Christ Jesus. The needs of the least of these, our brothers and
sisters, are the needs of Christ Jesus. We act as if we were constantly in the sight of Christ, in the presence of Christ. Paul says it this way, that “God has ordained us as Ambassadors of Christ, to promote reconciliation to every nation, to everyone. God makes an appeal through us, though our words, our beliefs, and our lives. “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to God’s self.” God has placed inside of us, in our hearts and minds, the word of reconciliation (*katallássō)*. God has called us to live and proclaim this ministry of reconciliation. God has commissioned us to promote it. “Be reconciled to God!” Be reconciled to one another!

This call, as Paul describes it, is a call to decisively change our self and persuade others to do the same. We are urged to befriend even our oppressors, even those who hate us, those who are at odds with us. To be reconciled means to be decisively changed, not temporarily changed, wholly changed, not partly changed. Once we put our hands to the plow of love we cannot turn back.
**[6]** John Lewis was decisively changed when he crossed the bridge between Selma and Montgomery on that fateful day. But, in the last analysis, and John would have agreed, it was not so much an honor for him, as it was an honor for the ministry of reconciliation that God has bestowed upon all of us. This love requires all of us and not just part of us. And John was always quick to say to the young, not everyone is called to the difficult road I have taken, but we are called to be decisively committed to the work of love and to build each other up in love.

It might seem to some that we are at a total loss to account for God’s work among us, says Paul, that we have no leg to stand upon, that we are beside ourselves and without a clue, that we are totally flabbergasted by the events of our time and cannot explain anything (*eksístēmi*). This is not the case. We are in our right minds for your sake. Just like the man named “Legion” came to his right mind in the presence of Jesus, sitting fully clothed and calmly at his feet (Lk. 8:35), so we too are clothed in eternity and in our right minds. We are held together, internally and collectively, by the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. One has died for all, and we all share in that atoning death, but it is also important that we share in that atoning life.

**[7]** Junot Diaz once wrote: “The half-life of love is forever!” The grace of God is resoundingly abundant and recursively redundant in Christ’s love. The love of Christ is never used up, never consumed completely, always alive, always relevant.

Let us be in our right minds today. Let us see through the lens of Christ Jesus; let us see the image of God in everyone we meet. Let us be decisively committed to the work of reconciliation.
And, just maybe, just perhaps, we might honor John Lewis, by taking up the cause and work of **antiracism,** rather than just being against racism. Anyway, it is a thought to consider in these troubled times, to bear forward the love of Christ Jesus that is never consumed. There is plenty of love for all!  Love compels us!  Be reconciled O Church! Amen.