

Romans 5:6-11

The month of June traditionally is the month for weddings. Some of you may have been married in this month. Entering into a marriage is not something we do without much thought and consideration. As the Lutheran Agenda says, we do not enter it “inadvisably or lightly, but reverently and deliberately.” And the school of experience has much to teach us about marriage and whom we should marry. No doubt all of you couples received counsel and advice before you were married from parents, grandparents, and other married couples with years of experience.

One pearl of wisdom that we probably all learned is that a spouse’s character will not suddenly improve with the wedding. If you don’t like something about him or her, you’d better learn to live with it because marriage will not change it. And yet, how many young men and women say to themselves, “once we’re married, I’ll work on changing him or her.”

Now when it comes to our spiritual marriage with God, then the opposite becomes true. God did not look for the perfect spouse. Rather, He chose as a bride, one which was quite unimpressive—rebellious, selfish, full of character flaws, despicable through and through—not the type of woman a young man would want to bring home to meet his folks. But this is the Bride our Savior selected, and we are grateful that He did, for we are that Bride.

In our text God refers to us in four ways. Four names He calls us, and they are not flattering—“helpless...ungodly...sinners...enemies of God.” In these six verses in Romans 5, you are referred to in no other way than this. Imagine, you married ladies, if your husband-to-be had introduced you to his parents using descriptions like that? I wonder how long you would have stuck around with him?

We do flatter ourselves, don’t we? No one likes to be called a bad name, even if it’s true. We like to hear good things about ourselves. We like to be praised, to be respected, to have good things said about us. And for the most part, this is what we receive from others. We live in a civil society. When you’re out working, and shopping, and playing, you don’t hear constant criticism from others. People don’t refer to you in a negative way, and call you bad names—for the most part. And that’s good. Otherwise life would be unbearable. We need to have decency and good order for our daily life. We need to speak praiseworthy of others, and hear kind things, also, from them in return.

But when it comes to God, we need to hear the truth. We don’t need to hear flattering descriptions from God. We need to know how and who we really are. You don’t see a doctor to hear how healthy you look. If you have cancer or heart disease, you want the truth.

And so when God refers to us as “helpless...ungodly...sinners...enemies of God,” we dare not close our ears, or get angry at His messenger. But rather, then it’s time to get down on our knees and ask the Great Physician to tell us how bad it really is. We don’t want our doctors to lie to us—how much more with God. Because ultimately, the doctor tells us the straight scoop so that he can give us the best medicine. But where earthly physicians

sometimes err and oftentimes say, “I’ve done all I can do”—our Great Physician always has the perfect cure, and that cure is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Romans 5, God calls us these bad names so that we can see more clearly His absolute grace. For with each instance of “name calling,” He proclaims His loving action toward us. “While we were helpless...Christ died for the ungodly.” “While we were yet sinners...Christ died for us.” “While we were enemies...(through His death) we were reconciled to God.”

The only action in the entire text belongs to God. While we were going about our business of sinning, God was going about His business of dying on account of our sins. While we were living hostile, ungodly lives toward Him, He was demonstrating His love toward us. While we were engaged in warfare against Him, He was making peace with us through the death of His Son on the cross.

This knocks the teeth out of “decision theology”—that it was my decision to believe in God; my decision to become a Christian. How ludicrous! I was busy fighting against Him when He died for me. I was rebelling against Him when He called me to Himself. Let’s not flatter ourselves. Let’s accept the truth of what Scripture says of us—we were not pretty to look at when God found us.

But God did not go out to find a wholesome, beautiful bride—He created one. You are that Bride. Ungodly, helpless, sinful, and hostile as you were, He took you for Himself. He died on the cross for you. He washed you clean in the waters of the font, and dressed you in the white garment of His innocence—so that you are now, as He says in Ephesians 5, “holy and blameless...with no spot or wrinkle.”

So, which is it?...we may wonder. Am I a beautiful Bride of Christ, holy and blameless, or a hostile, ungodly sinner? Am I a child of God, or a child of Satan? Am I a saint, or a sinner? And the answer is—“yes, and yes.” In this world, every Christian is both saint and sinner, holy Bride and hostile rebel, claimed by Christ and yet one who daily gives in to Satan’s charms.

One day, in heaven’s glory, we will be completely free of sin. Here we live only and entirely by faith in Jesus Christ who forgives us of our sin in the Word of the Gospel—the constant cure for our sin-sickened souls.

A better question, perhaps, is “how does God see me?” “What does He think of me?” He took you as His Bride, reconciled you to Himself (made peace with you), not because of anything in you but because of His grace in Christ. He made you who you now are in Christ—holy and blameless, righteous in His eyes. He does not look upon your sin, for you, the “baptized” are in Christ.

When a bride walks up the aisle on the day of her wedding, what does her husband-to-be see? Does he see all her imperfections? Does he notice anything at all that’s wrong with her? No! He sees a beautiful woman dressed in white—one whom he loves with his whole heart.

That is how God sees you and feels about you. For though you were ugly with sin when He found you—His enemy, a rebel—now, by making peace with you through the death of His Son on the cross and washing you in Christ's blood at the font, you have become to Him a most holy and radiant Bride, one whom He cherishes with His whole heart.

And you see that person sitting across the aisle, or sitting in the next pew, who has all those glaring character flaws—who really needs to do something about their behavior? You may see an unlikable person, but God sees a beautiful Bride. God sees no fault in him or her—no stain, no blemish, no sin. Baptized into Christ, that person is holy in His sight. Does he or she live a life free from sin? No more than you and I do. But he or she is just as welcome as you are to hear and believe Christ's Word of forgiveness—His Word of reconciliation.

And so when we work together, when we come together in Council meetings and Voters meetings, we want to remember who we're sitting next to; who we're speaking with, or against—the bride of Christ; His beloved; one for whom He died, and then claimed for His own in the water of Baptism.

I see before me people with all types of personalities; different shapes and sizes; some with wrinkles; some with warts; some with age spots—and you, friend, because you are in Christ, are most beautiful to your God. He chose you out of love, in Him. He keeps you, for Christ's sake, out of pure grace. He will never grow tired of you. He will never divorce you. Even to your dying day, your God has nothing in His heart toward you except pure forgiveness and mercy.

He has made you His beloved Bride—and that is who you are. You did nothing to earn that. It's all by grace. May God graciously lead you to always believe this, even unto the end. Amen.