

## Yes, You!

*"I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20b).*

When something good happens to you, you might find it hard to believe: "Who, me?"

Maybe you recall the Publisher's Clearinghouse television commercials that showed their Prize Patrol appearing on someone's doorstep to award a big check for a lot of money. Think of the reaction from people who unsuspectingly answered their doorbells. "Who, me?" "Yes," came the answer, "you."

Sometimes you can have difficulty wrapping your mind around good news. The test is positive, and you and your husband or wife are now parents! In a few months you expect to meet your new baby face-to-face. Here's a cause for joy, yet you might still say, "Wow! Us? Me?" Or: the test comes back negative. You are now cancer-free. "Really . . . me?" When one man heard good news over the telephone, he laughed right out loud in the caller's ear. He couldn't believe it. "Who, me?" The voice on the other end assured him, "Yes, you."

Today I am here to proclaim the greatest Good News that could ever be, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Listen when I say: YES, CHRIST IS FOR YOU! I know that this Good News is also for other people. Jesus died for them too. He died for all. Right now, though, I am talking to you. I mean you. Yes, you.

The saving Gospel has been proclaimed in these terms ever since the first Christmas. An angel brought the message to shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem, saying, "Unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). St. Paul echoed this highly personal note when he wrote the Galatians, "I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*" (Galatians 2:20). Faith talks this way: "Yes, me!"

Yet a statement like this may not come so easily to the lips. I mean not only the lips of non-Christians, but also those of Christians. It's almost as if I figure it would be too grand to say that the Lord gave Himself for me. I mean: who, me? Really?

Watch out whenever that happens to you. When we assume such an attitude, church becomes boring frighteningly fast. The Lord Himself appears uninteresting, at best. He just doesn't seem to hold a lot for you, so you stop expecting much from Him.

The old truism proves true: When people do not see their need, they will not appreciate the Savior. If you have not heeded God's Law, you won't have much use for His Gospel. Yet in reality, the same sin dwells in us as in the prophet Isaiah. He encountered the holy God and cried out that he was completely destroyed. Isaiah was a man of unclean lips. He dwelled in the midst of a people with unclean lips, all right, but he was not thinking about them. *His* eyes had

seen the King, the Lord of hosts, and as a result terror struck his heart (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah needed news that was good *for him*. So do you.

It's terrible when people miss the *for you*. Consider the "nones," not N-U-Ns but N-O-N-Es: people who respond to surveys about religious preference or church affiliation by saying they have "none." In the past, some of them might have belonged to a church, but today they're more likely to say they are "spiritual but not religious." Do you suppose the *need* for a Redeemer has really "hit" them? How about the *fact of* a Redeemer? Are they out there basically saying, "Who, me?"

It's even possible to miss the *for you* from within the church. Nothing is helped when the Gospel is not proclaimed clearly and truly. When Martin Luther was growing up, the church taught that faith had something to do with salvation. Yet it did not draw the connection too closely between salvation and one's faith. Faith was often defined as an intellectual knowledge of what Jesus had done. Or, somewhat better, faith might have been directed to salvation – but a salvation off in the future, to be attained someday. Studying the Greek New Testament, though, Luther saw how faith believes that Christ is "for me."

About a year after the 95 Theses, Rome ordered Luther to appear before a cardinal named Cajetan at Augsburg. The cardinal was simply supposed to have Luther take everything back. Instead Cajetan opened a discussion in which, among other things, Luther insisted that faith latches onto God's promises and applies them to oneself right here and now. At length, Cajetan dismissed Luther in frustration. To hustle Luther out of Augsburg for his own safety, his friends put him on a horse which he rode back to Wittenberg. He arrived on October 31, 1518: one year, to the day, after he had posted the 95 Theses. Luther rode for his life, but still more, in God-given faith he *believed* for his life. That is, through faith he received new life from the great God Himself. Even Wittenberg might not have offered Luther a lot of security at that time, yet when people asked where he would go if he had to leave, he answered: "under the heavens." It didn't matter. God was for him in Christ, so who could be against him? Luther was living by faith in the Son of God who loved Luther and gave Himself for Luther.

What Luther understood and believed is that there is no need to live like you are merely on parole before God when in fact you have been pardoned. Out of God's forgiveness comes life, yes, for you. By inspiration, St. John wrote in his first epistle: "I write this to *you* that *you* may know that *you* have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). The same message applies to us just as much, right now. Eternal life is for you because Christ is for you. He is on your side, and He took your place. He paid the price for you. He lived the life you should have lived. He died the death you should have died. Not long after Luther's interview with Cajetan, he wrote words that you too can say in faith: "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did" (AE 31, 297). And because the Lord Jesus lives, you live also.

There is nothing somehow positive or noble about shrinking back from this, about blunting or minimizing the *for you*. These days, some people tell Christians that the church, the congregation to which they belong, is not really for them. It exists for unchurched people yet to be reached, so goes the claim. Well, the church certainly does reach out with the Gospel. But the church has nothing to give without first receiving from the Lord through His Word. Never forget that God's Word, which the church and her pastors bring, is directed straight at you. Christ is for you. He loved you and gave Himself for you.

Just read the Psalms, to see the psalmists speaking the language of faith. By inspiration, they rejoiced to say, "Yes! Me!" For example: "They said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad" (Psalm 126:2-3). You can say this as well: not only that the Lord has done great things for others, but also that He has done great things for *us*. Or, "When I thought, 'My foot slips,' your steadfast love, O Lord, held *me* up" (Psalm 94:18). True, *everyone's* help is in the Lord, but still more: "*Our* help is in the Name of the Lord Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). You can say this. You *do* say this, again and again, in church. This is the way faith talks. With the hymn writer you sing, "As the branch is to the Vine, I am His and He is mine." The Lord is for you. Yes, you.

It stands out as terrible whenever people miss the *for you*, when even Christians don't seem to get it. Every pastor has known catechism pupils who act like they have a default switch set on one answer about who they believe in. "I believe in God," they keep saying. Although this answer certainly is not wrong, it can be sharpened in a definite *for you* direction. The Small Catechism provides fine sharpening: "I believe that Jesus Christ . . . is *my* Lord, Who has redeemed *me*, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won *me* from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil." All sorts of people can content themselves to say, "I believe in God." One proud lodge member used to say these words all the time, until on his deathbed the Holy Spirit got through to him with the message of Christ *for you*. Then the man confessed, "Jesus Christ is my Lord." Here is a matter of life and death. No one else can die in your place. In the hour of death, no God will be of help to you besides the Christ Who loved you and gave Himself for you. In Him, it's a matter of *death* and *life* for you.

Years ago, Dr. Gerhard Aho, who taught at the seminary in Springfield and Ft. Wayne, was sick unto death. His illness ended up lasting for many months. As it began, he was about to start a sabbatical leave. When his leave ended and time came for him to return to the classroom, he did not feel well enough to do so. Dr. George Kraus volunteered to teach a summer course, without pay, so Dr. Aho could rest. Dr. Aho reached into his own pocket, saying, "George, I've got some money." Dr. Kraus would have none of it. "No," he said, "this is for you."

To you, God says something better. The angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). By the grace of God, that's you. This is for you. The father runs out, throws his arms around his wayward child, and orders the ring to be put on the finger, the robe placed on the back, the fattened calf to be killed and a celebration to start (Luke 15:20-24). This is for you. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Rest, now and for all eternity! Because of Christ, this is for you.

At the last LWML District convention here in Central Illinois, keynote speaker Gary Thies said there's a problem in Christianity these days: we don't take it personally enough. He had a point. Whenever we lose sight of the *for you*, we start wanting to pay. Yet there's no need for that, not when you live by faith in the Son of God Who loved you and gave Himself for you. *He* paid, "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." It's for you, this payment that runs so deep. It covers all your sin, even what lurks way down beneath the surface. And this same payment spreads out wide, too. Christ is the complete covering for our sins, "and not ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

So the news that stands out as so good for you turns out to be every bit as good for others. We can turn to people all around us and say: Christ is for you. Yes, you!

That is what the church does. Think about this: if you win a Publisher's Clearinghouse prize, or discover you are having a baby, or learn that the cancer is gone – you talk about it. Well, wonderful as all those things are, the Lord has given us something so much more wonderful to talk about! Isaiah in his vision received forgiveness for his sin when his lips were touched with a burning coal from God's altar, yet your lips and your mouth have received the very body and blood of Christ that bought and paid for you. Come what may, you can say, "Nevertheless, I am baptized."

You *do* have something, the greatest "something" of all, to talk about. Fight the impulses that would keep you quiet about it. The Lord goes with you every step of the way. Remember, He is *for you*.

And it is wonderful to support the proclamation of His Good News in all manner of places, far and near, by the church and her pastors. Support it with your prayers. Support it with your offerings. It is worth being set forth, and worth setting ourselves back. Who, me? Yes, you.

People do this sort of thing when they get swept up into Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost. Why not? Why in the Lord's name not?

After all, Christ is for you. He loved you and gave Himself for you. Yes, you.