

"Born To Love"
1 Peter 1:22-23
Pastor Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church
May 4, 2014

In the mid-1970's, a brash new prophetic voice exploded onto the rock and roll scene. From Asbury Park, New Jersey, Bruce Springsteen was hailed both by critics and consumers. His third album, "Born To Run," was a tremendous success; and the title track expressed powerfully the yearning and the longing of millions of young people to break free from the bonds of convention and traditionalism, the compulsion to "get out while we're young" and find our own way, explore our own values.

Now, I know I'm showing my age by talking about this album from the 70's. And "Born To Run" was certainly not a Christian rock album. And, yet, every single one of us Christians today, just like Bruce Springsteen back then, we are born to do something specific. All of us -- young and old, as children of God and followers of Jesus Christ -- we have this yearning and longing within us. We are compelled, the Bible says, we are BORN TO LOVE!

Peter writes, "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

You know how sometimes, though, it is so hard for us to love one another, to genuinely love each other from the heart in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our church? You know this, you've experienced it, how it's difficult for sinners like us to get past our self-centered nature, and to overcome grudges, past hurts, racism, ethnic differences.

"Love one another earnestly from a pure heart" -- that's hard, isn't it? We know that God loves us like that. Jesus loves us all, with an earnest, pure, holy love. He loved us so much that he gave up his life for us. But we humans struggle, don't we, when it comes to that kind of love? Our marriages aren't pure. Our parenting isn't perfect. Our friendships and our relationships, with each other and with God, are often troubled and tricky. Bruce Springsteen and the Beatles and Taylor Swift and Pharrell Williams have written countless songs about love; but don't we all still struggle to do what the Bible tells us to do here? "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart."

St. Peter reminds us today, though, that we're not just called to love, challenged to love, supposed to love. He says we are BORN TO LOVE!

"Love one another earnestly from a pure heart," Peter writes, "since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." You and I have been born again, BORN TO LOVE!

Born again ... how does that work? Can a person enter his or her mother's womb, and literally be born again? Not physically; but on a spiritual level, when God enters a person's heart and by grace forgives the sins that separate that person from God, that person is given a new spiritual life. There's a new birth, a fresh start, a restored relationship.

Through simple faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to forgive all those sins of ours, you and I have been born again! Just as Jesus came alive again on Easter after he was crucified and buried, so we have been given new life and a clean heart by our God.

And today's clear, direct message from the Word of God is that we are not born to run, not born to be greedy, not born to chase after our own pursuits, not born to be selfish and nasty. We are BORN TO LOVE! "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart," **since** you have been born again."

Now, some of our Christian brothers and sisters in other denominations would tell us that you can only be born again if you are of a certain age, if you express your belief in Jesus in certain words, if you're baptized in a certain way. I would agree with all of that, if the Bible required it of us. But the Bible makes it very, very clear -- and this is our Lutheran understanding -- that being born again is not something that we do, but something that God does in us.

"You must be born again," Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3, "born of water and the Spirit." Peter preached, in today's First Lesson, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "You have been born again," Peter writes in today's Epistle lesson, "through the living and abiding word of God."

For some Christians, there's a dramatic moment of conversion and acceptance, when God changes their heart and brings them to faith in Jesus. Being born again can happen like that. But for many other Christians, there are just seeds of faith planted by God in a Baptism; and there is slow and steady nurturing of that faith by loving parents and godparents and congregations. And we see every day here at Hope children and youth, and adults, too, who have known the Lord Jesus and his wonderful grace since childhood, since infancy. Their faith is centered on Jesus Christ. Their sins are forgiven. They have been born again, and we have all been given a new start, a new spiritual birth by our loving God.

And we are BORN, Peter tells us today, TO LOVE! There's a purpose for this Christian life you've been given. You are to love others, earnestly, from a pure heart, every day. There's a reason why God redeemed you and called you to faith. It's so that you will love others with the pure, holy love of Jesus Christ. There's an objective that God has in planting this big church full of born-again Christians on this hill overlooking Rogers Road. He wants us to be active and alive, to be yearning and longing to proclaim and live out his love. We are BORN TO LOVE -- compelled to get out there, whether we are young or old, and to just love others in the name of Jesus.

We Lutherans don't have to save the world -- God's already done that. We are BORN TO LOVE! We Christians don't have to pretend that we're perfect -- God knows we're not. But we are BORN TO LOVE! We here at Hope don't have to have all the answers for all of our community's needs -- God knows the answers. We are BORN TO LOVE!

So in the name of Jesus, who loves you and me with an everlasting love, let's get out there and do what we were born to do. We are BORN TO LOVE! Amen.