

Pentecost 3rd Sunday, “Reconciliation” Romans 5 10

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

This morning’s Epistle reading is critical to Paul’s letter writing project: this is the heart of his argument. His thesis is that we live by faith for faith – that a righteousness apart from works of the law has been revealed, not in works, but through the faith in and of Jesus.

In verses 6-8 Paul makes the classic argument for the passiveness of faith. God is not rewarding us for our works, nor even for our disposition. God has saved us while we were hostile, opposed, and indeed, the very enemies of God. Jesus did not die in some heroic act of brotherly love for His noble friend, jumping on the grenade for His platoon mate. Jesus died for the very brutal men who slaughtered Him. God’s love is that amazing. It is not based on the lovability of the object. As Samuel Crossman said in “My Song is Love Unknown” (LSB 430), He did this that the unlovely might lovely be.

In verses 9-11 Paul explains what he means by this righteousness bestowed upon us. Christ’s death for us means that God is wholly committed to us. Jesus’ death has reconciled us to God, sweeping away the hostility created between God and man by our sinfulness.

Reconciled: to be made friendly again. – *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, Collegiate Edition, 1966.*

Now that we are reconciled, we will surely be saved from death and devil because Jesus lives. His life bestowed on us in Baptism (6:1-6) means the life of Christ is our life. (Galatians 2:20 – Christ lives in me!) This life allows us now to rejoice in the very God who was our terrible enemy before. We hated Him when we were in sin. We realized that He was holy and we must die in His presence.

But our delight in our being declared holy is not some obligation of gratitude we are supposed to pay. It is a genuine delight in God. We were enemies who begrudged Him His authority and rightful place. Now, redeemed by Christ, raised and restored to friendship (indeed, kinship) with God, we love God.

God does not wait for us to be good or even to try hard before He acts. His will is to save. For even we would not wait to see if a drowning man really wants to be saved before we call for help, or throw him a life-preserver, or jump in the water to save him. We would just act. So, God sees our predicament and He acts according to His good and gracious will, His saving will.

What is more, that salvation is not over with. We have been fully reconciled to God. The death of Jesus on the cross has borne sin's deadly weight. Now, raised from the grave, Jesus is a living promise of even more. Not only are our sins paid for, but we are given a whole new life. In this new life we may rejoice, serve, live, play, and much more in His gracious gift.

The final section of the passage describes a fun and memorable pattern. There is a strange symmetry. Sin came into the world through one man, Adam. Righteousness also came back into this world through one man, Jesus. These two singular individuals have done something that has affected the whole of the human race. Adam because he was the forefather of all humanity, and Jesus because He took humanity itself into the Godhead. In both cases, the effect is universal. All humans have been redeemed in Christ. The pattern was established in Adam but now runs backwards. Just as death came through one man, now life also comes through the one man Jesus Christ.

God's great love does not hang on our goodness, not even the goodness of our intent, not even the goodness of our will. God's love is not a response to anything in us, but is wholly God's to give.

The same Savior that died for us has risen to everlasting, perfect life, and His life is devoted to that one end, to set us aside for a holy purpose: to protect, and to save us eternally, to bring us into that wonderful life of divine glory.

And so, we break forth in the joy and glory in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the restoration of friendship. The reconciliation of God toward sinners is so thorough that He feels the warmest friendship for us, and that we, in turn, rejoice and glory in our God. Every believer that is reconciled to God through Christ is sure that all further hostility is

excluded. As Luther said, "We glory in God that God is ours and we are His, and that we have all goods in common from Him and with Him in all confidence."

This is no self-righteous boasting, but a cheerfulness and confidence through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has erased our guilt, canceled our debt. And thus, all anxiety as to our final outcome is removed from our hearts. The hope of eternal salvation is a sure and certain hope which fills the hearts of the believers with quiet joy and causes them to be content in the glorious fact of having been made acceptable to God through faith.

The future fact of the matter is that glory awaits us, the completion of our being counted righteous, the kind of creatures in whom God takes delight, and the completion of our being at peace, the shalom—the peace and order of Eden restored, with everyone—God and His human creatures—and everything in their right places.

The past fact of the matter is that Christ died for us while we were in revolt against him. His was a real corpse; His was a real resurrection. He cashed in the wages of our sin; He has given us the free gift of life. His promise of future glory rests on His already having accomplished the transfer of ownership of our sins to Him and his tomb and transfer of His immortal life to our accounts (Rom 6:3–11).

We are no longer the persons we were. As Abram and Sarai received new identities in the Old Testament (Gen. 17), so our baptismal certificates constitute new identity documents for us. Abraham and Sarah henceforth lived from God's promise to make them more than citizens of Ur; they became father and mother of the people of God. We live out of our new identity as children of God, trusting His promise of His presence, His forgiving love, His provision, and His protection in our lives.

God identifies us with Jesus, whom Peter identified as the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). Jesus promised the disciples the prospect of suffering and death because of their association with Him (Mk 8:34–35, Jn 15:18–25), but He also promised everlasting life in His presence (Lk 23:43, Jn 14:2–4). The gospel comes

to remind us day in and day out that God's word of forgiveness, life, and salvation has given us a new identity as children of God and the will and desire to live in the peace and joy that produces service to the world and love for one another.

The Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori explored the mystery of the cross of Jesus Christ by developing what he termed a "theology of the pain of God." Kitamori sums it up this way: "The gospel is the gospel of the cross. This means that God loves the objects of his anger and that He, in His love, embraces men alienated from Him."

In other words, God's essential righteousness or justice is moved to anger against sin, but God chooses to love precisely those His own righteousness condemns. How can the holy God love weak, ungodly sinners? This conflict is precisely what the Japanese theologian Kitamori calls "the pain of God." It is not that our sins hurt God or cause Him pain; sin prompts God's wrath, but it does not hurt Him. The pain of God, revealed on the cross of Christ, results from God's determination to love the sinners that His justice kills.

But the problem only arises if sin is taken seriously. The God who is perfectly just and righteous cannot simply overlook the sins by which His creatures have separated themselves from Him. If God ignores sin, He is not really just. And if sin must be punished, then it would mean that God's righteousness trumps His mercy.

A common, simplistic answer is that God "loves the sinner" but "hates the sin." Many of us have used that sort of distinction, but it is not really sufficient. Such an answer trivializes both the depth of sin and the magnitude of what God has done in Christ. As our present text makes clear, the trouble is emphatically not that we are basically decent, lovable people who have made inadvertent mistakes or lapses that need to be cleaned up. God did not rescue us because we were His friends who drifted off course or run into trouble. While we were His enemies, Christ died for us. God's love is given precisely to the unlovable ones who deserve wrath and condemnation.

While Paul's description of himself and his readers as formerly God's enemies and ungodly certainly described the biography of that first generation of Christians, we may not feel that the words apply equally well to us.

Paul, after all, was an adult convert, and had actively engaged in the persecution of Christians and rejection of Christ. Many of the believers in Rome had been pagans—idol worshipers—before coming to faith in Christ. Of them, certainly, it is fair and accurate to say that Christ died for them while they were still “that kind” of sinner.

But is the situation really that bad with a lifelong Christian today, someone who was brought to the faith as an infant in Baptism and has lived as a believer ever since? We need to confront the present reality of sin and enmity toward God that haunts even the hearts of lifelong believers. The saving death of Christ is not something that we only needed for a single past experience of conversion. Rather, Christ's death, once for all, is still the very power that overcomes our pathetic spiritual weakness, the sin that so easily entangles us, and the awful hostility toward God that can and does lurk inside us and sometimes springs forth even against our will.

So, reconciliation is what we need...over and over again, as in Confession and Absolution, as in Word and Sacrament. And that is what we get, if only you will open your ears and hear, if only you will open your mouths to receive. And so, we echo the words of Hymn 430:

Here, I might stay and sing, no story so divine!
Never was love, dear King,
never was grief, like Thine. This is my friend,
in whose sweet praise, I all my days
could gladly spend! – LSB 430, v.7

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in You to life everlasting. Amen!