

## **Written: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 “The Amazing Work of Reconciliation”**

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### **Text: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

### **Exegetical Statement**

Paul encourages us to see ourselves and those around us no longer as the world sees mankind, as those who have the right and privilege to do as they please with their life without respect to our Creator God from whom all that we are and have is a gift. This realization came when Paul no longer saw Jesus as just a man pushing Himself and His own agenda that stood contrary to God. Now He sees Jesus as the gift from God to reconcile all mankind back to it's Creator. Christ came as the one and only human being who knew no sin, because He never committed sin, yet by His own choosing was made to be sin, all mankind's sin so that He could suffer and die for it. In doing so He has given to us by faith what His life of obedience earned and deserved: the pronouncement of right standing with God. His death brought reconciliation with the Father by all who believe, as there now stands no offenses by which would cause God to be angry and by which we should deserve punishment now and eternally. This reconciliation is declared to all people by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel Message. And as those who have been reconciled to God through it, we have been drafted as His Church to be ambassadors who carry that Gospel Message of reconciliation to those around who need to hear it, by our words and actions, knowing the Holy Spirit is always present to work that miraculous reconciliation in the hardest of hearts.

### **Focus Statement:**

Just as with the Prodigal Son our Heavenly Father is the sole source of reconciliation with Him. He reaches out to us in our misery through the Law: preached and Not Preached. He makes us see our misery for what it is, then turns our eyes to His ever-outstretched arms of complete restoration and reconciliation earned by Christ's death and resurrection and given by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. He moves us to reconcile with those around us with the same love that has reconciled us to Himself.

### **Function Statement:**

#### **Why it's important to know:**

We fail to see our lives as being a lot like the Prodigal: all we have has been given from God, yet we treat our lives as our own and all that we have to do with as we wish. We obey His commands and directives that please us and ignore those that don't. We act like the older son when disagreements pop up with others refusing to forgive completely or with conditions because they started it.

#### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

See the wonder and bliss of God's unconditional reconciliation and restoration through faith in Christ. Be Gospel reconcilers to those around us by forgiving and loving unconditionally the way Christ continues to love us.

### **Subject Sentence: The Gospel: reconciles us and is the means for others**

## **Introduction: Feuds: Hatfield's and McCoy's**

Fights, feuds, quarrels, and disagreements. Life in this world is no stranger to these things. We see it being carried out on the world stage right now. And no doubt your own life is no stranger to them. It is something called marriage. Marriage is filled with occasional quarrels and feuds. And while hopefully they are resolved to some extent, often they are never as completely resolved as either spouse might honestly like. Forgiveness is offered, but there lacking a "no strings attached" forgiveness. Past words and actions are not forgotten but filed away for future recitation and use. Instead of disagreements being forgiven and forgotten what happens is more of a truce.

That's the case with the most famous of all family feuds: The Hatfield's vs. The McCoy's. Now the extended families are no longer openly fighting and a truce has been declared. But there is still some finger pointing as to who started the feud to begin with that developed into an all-out war between the two extended families. If you are on the McCoy side you would site the murder of family Patriarch Asa Harmon McCoy as he returned home from fighting for the Union side during the Civil War. He was confronted by some Confederate Home Guards of which Hatfield Patriarch "Devil Anse" Hatfield was a member. It was alleged that he was the one who murdered Asa Harmon in cold blood. Later it would be found out that was impossible since "Devil Anse" Hatfield was home in bed ill.

If you were on the side of the Hatfield's, you might sight the contested ownership of a prize pig by members of both families. The matter went to the local Justice of the Peace who was a member of the Hatfield clan. He ruled in the Hatfield's favor based on the testimony of a witness who was regarded by many of those outside these families as non-biased, since he was related to both of them. Some time later this witness was killed in an altercation with two McCoy brothers. They were later acquitted on the grounds of self-defense. The Hatfield's decided to seek their own brand of justice against these two McCoy brothers. Add to that the love affair of Roseanna McCoy with Johnson Hatfield and you have a powder keg that was ignited, and the fighting that lasted for more than 40 years. While the formal disagreements have been settled in court, and family members of both sides have gathered for a combined family reunion, 120 years later they still disagree on whose fault it was that started the whole thing.

Now I hope and pray whatever disagreements you've experienced have never been as contentious or have lasted as long. But even so there are echoes of the Hatfield and McCoy feuds that reverberate in our lives when we are unwilling to take ownership in of our part in it. In almost every disagreement there are wrongs done on both sides. What we call reconciliation is more of a truce, with the powder keg still in the room, ready to be lit again.

## **Our Feud With God: We Are the Prodigal Son**

But there is one feud that each one of us is embroiled in where we are fully in the wrong, and that is our ongoing feud with God over our sin. How often do you think of your sin as making you an enemy of God? Now, as good Lutherans we are always ready to admit that our God is perfect and that we daily sin against Him in thought word and deed. And we know that because of Jesus our sin is forgiven. But do we sometimes struggle with our sins being forgotten by God? Do we sometimes see our being forgiven as more like the kind of truce that we make with others? How does God see things from His point of view? That is what we have before us in Jesus' parable we know The Prodigal Son.

You know this story fairly well; a young man comes to his father and demands his share of what he is due to inherit upon his father's death. When he receives it, he takes off leaving his dad and brother high and dry. He takes that wealth, meant to carry him throughout his entire life and blows it all on debauchery, living with only his sinful pleasure in mind. When he has spent every last dime, a famine comes upon the land. The only recourse for this Jewish boy is to work slopping out pigs, the lowest and nastiest of jobs. He has nothing. No one gives him anything. He is so hungry he longs to eat the pig's food, which tastes terrible, and is not nutritious for humans.

Now let's insert ourselves into it. We of course are the Prodigal Son, and the father is our Heavenly Father. But in what way do we demand our share of the property, of the estate of our Heavenly Father? We neglect to see that all that we have doesn't belong to us, it's all a gift. Our very lives are a gracious gift from the Heavenly Father that we didn't ask for, earn, or deserve. If our very life itself is a gift, then it follows that all that we have and hold are gifts too. House and home, wife and family and children, wealth and relationships are all His gracious gift. He has made us who we are by giving us the talents and gifts through which we have carved out the existence we have.

He gives all these gifts not just for our own gratification and benefit, but to bring honor and glory to Him by using them to show our love for Him and reflect His love for others. Instead we take them and run with them, using them to please ourselves with no concern about our eternal future. We make them more important than the God who gave them to us, revering them and worshipping them, looking to them for protection against all that might come, instead of trusting in the God who is their source. We walk away from Him to live in the world like the world does, and when trouble comes, we find that none of these things we've made our gods can help us or save us. In doing all this we've made our Heavenly Father our enemy and have given Him every right to disown us, just as the Prodigal Son had done.

## **God the Reconciler: The Prodigal's Father**

But what happens when the Prodigal Son hits rock bottom? He thinks back on the life he once had with his father. He never lacked anything including food, clothing, shelter, even through times of famine. And he knows something about his father, that he is a loving man and just man. He hopes beyond hope that if he humbles himself before his father he might be welcomed back; certainly not as a son anymore; he had given up that right, but to be a hired servant in the house of his father. Even that would be better than his life now. And so, he turns away from his life and turns back toward his father.

In the midst of his misery how is he able to turn back to his father? How can he be sure that his father will be merciful? How can we be sure that our Heavenly Father will be gracious and merciful to us? Jesus here is describing a work that only God can do in a person's life. We call it repentance. Repentance begins as the Holy Spirit brings the work of the law to bear upon our hearts and minds. The Law, in the hands of the Holy Spirit shows us how we have turned away from our Father and His good gifts. He uses the Law in Scripture, but also the Law not Preached: the law that is the sinful consequences of living in a broken world. These are the problems and afflictions that cause us to hit rock bottom, the things that show us that we, and all that we have made to be our gods in place of the LORD God, can't handle all life has to throw at us.

But then the Holy Spirit shows us the loving face of God our Savior. Just as the Prodigal Son remembered how gracious and merciful his father was, the Holy Spirit tells us about the love and grace of our Heavenly Father. Through the Gospel Message He turns our head and our heart back to Him. And we find something even greater than the Prodigal found. For him, his father came running to meet him. When we turn back to our Savior God, we find that although we tried to leave Him, He never left us. He has been there the whole time with arms outstretched waiting to receive us back by the faith He has given us.

That's the work of repentance, and it is done in your heart and mine through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Law and the Gospel. He moves you to turn away from your sin, and turn back to Him, desiring no longer to live to please yourself, but live to please Him in worshipful and loving obedience that brings true joy and happiness. But how is it that the Gospel can do this? How can we be fully restored after what we've done? Where does its power come from?

**2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

It comes from our God who doesn't simply sweep our offenses under the rug. He accomplished the work of reconciliation by sending His only Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who completely and eternally dealt with our offenses, all of them. He had no sin, yet He willingly became sin, your sin and my sin. He took all of them upon Himself and suffered in your place. Because He did this, instead of seeing us as disobedient children who have squandered His precious gift of life, He now sees us as being in right standing with Him. We can turn back to God in repentance, trusting by faith that we receive complete and full forgiveness of sins each and every time we do so. It's forgiveness with no strings attached. We stand before Him with no charges against us because Jesus dealt with them all once and forever. In Christ you have been fully reconciled to God.

**2 Corinthians 5:17-18 <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;**

We are reconciled by God to become a new creation, just as the Prodigal was. We return from being enemies of our God to find we have been completely restored as His precious child, with all the rights and privileges that come with it. We are re-made this new creation every time we repent of our sin and hold fast to the work of reconciliation we have in Jesus' death and resurrection. Just as the Prodigal's father held a banquet for him, our Heavenly Father gives to us the banquet that is the Sacrament of the Altar where our place and position as His precious children is restored and renewed, and where we are blessed with all the physical and spiritual gifts that our Savior has won for us. He strengthens us and renews our faith so that we will enjoy that banquet to end all banquets in Eternal Life to come. All of this work is from God, who is always at work through His means of grace to reconcile us and keep us reconciled to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Paul's Call to Reconciliation Ministry: Don't Be Older Brother**

**2 Corinthians 5:19-20 <sup>19</sup>...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

Paul tells us that the Heavenly Father through His dear Son was reconciling not just you and I, but the whole world to Himself. As His precious children, the Church, He has given us the ministry of telling the world about this reconciliation. And He has given us the means to do so: the Gospel Message.

He calls us to be ambassadors. And how do we do that? We look into the lives of those around us and see where He is already at work through the Law Not Preached to show them that they are Prodigals who are squandering the good gifts of life and faith they have been given. We pray that the Holy Spirit would move us to share His Words of Law as needed, but when we see their hearts breaking, we share that Gospel Message of reconciliation. That message will, in the hands of the Spirit, turn them back into the waiting arms of the Heavenly Father.

He calls us to live out this ministry of reconciliation with each other, in the occasional feuds and disagreements we have with each other. We are very often like the older son who refused to accept that since his father had completely forgiven his brother, he was called to do the same. We are called to remember the remarkable and powerful reconciliation that Jesus has worked in our lives. And because He forgives with no strings attached and no holds barred, in our life as a new creation we are to work at forgiving others in the same manner. That's living out a very powerful witness of Gospel reconciliation

## **Conclusion**

Forgiving others is a process, and it doesn't always happen as completely and perfectly as we'd like it to. Often what we find is more of an uneasy truce like the Hatfield's and McCoy's than forgive and forget. The process is prolonged by our refusal to see our part in the feud and confess it to God and to each other. Every quarrel we engage in is a sin against God, as well as sins against our fellow man. But the Holy Spirit is at work in your life to reconcile you to your Heavenly Father. And through that reconciliation comes the power to truly reconcile with one another. It gives to us the same forgiveness that Christ won for us and moves us to share that with one another. God wants to restore you and I and those we come in contact with just like the Prodigal Son in Jesus' Parable. And the means by which it happens is the Gospel Message, the message of reconciliation that we share and live out through word and action, through which the Spirit works in our lives and in the lives of others. Amen.