

“God’s Reconciliation”

March 3, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

This Wednesday is the start of Lent which simply calls us to journey with Jesus to the cross. In light of that, I want to take a little time this morning to remember the place the cross holds in our relationship with God. To do that, I need to go all the way back to the beginning.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God establishes Himself as a God of order. What I mean by that is in creation, God brought order from chaos. Before God came along to change things, Genesis 1, verse 2 says “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the waters.” To this formless void of chaos, God brought structure and order: on the first day, light; on the second day, an atmosphere that provided space for life; on the third day, land and plants to live in the new space created; and so on. Each day built upon the day before. On the 6th day God created people and gave them a job. God gave them dominion, which meant they were in charge of making sure things on earth stayed in order and didn’t revert back to chaos. As people, we have done an amazing job with our dominion. We have brought the whole earth into order as we want it. With the exception of the mosquito and the weather, we have pretty much made all of creation submit to our will – our understanding of order. But Genesis 3 reminds us we have only gotten half of the equation. We have established order with everything beneath us, but we have failed to keep ourselves in order with that that is above us. We have made the world submit to us, but we have failed to submit to God. From Adam and Eve to pastor Mike and you, we want to be in charge. We want to make our own decisions based on our own criteria of what is important to us. When we do that, from Adam and Eve to Pastor Mike and you, we end up with brokenness: brokenness with God (hiding from God and even pretending God doesn’t exist or doesn’t matter), brokenness with each other (that woman you gave me the fruit, she made me do it), brokenness within ourselves (ashamed, embarrassed as illustrated by the fact that we are the only animal on earth that wears clothes even when it is 90 degrees out).

The thing is, God is not okay with all this brokenness, and all this brokenness is the result of a breakdown in God’s order. Dog trainers tell us both the humans and the dogs are much happier if the pecking order is established properly with the humans training the dogs as opposed to the other way around. Teachers will tell you both them and their students thrive when there is order in the classroom and chaos is kept at bay. The same is true with us and God. Brokenness and chaos does not allow us to thrive. So God begins the hard work of trying to fixing it – of reconciling the brokenness and reestablishing order.

Of course the first plan was to ignore the problem knowing humans would figure it out and come back to God, but that never works. Things only got worse. Just 3 chapters later in the 6th chapter of Genesis, even the division between heaven and earth is breaking down and verse 5 says, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.” God decided to destroy the

earth and start all over again with Noah and his family, but it wasn't long after the waters of the great flood receded that Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk and one of his sons failed to show proper respect and God's order was broken again.

God recognized that people really liked being rich with all sorts of fancy things, so God chose a family, Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, with the idea that they would follow and obey God and God would make them so rich in money, possessions, family and peace that everyone else in the world would want to be just like them so they could be rich like them. It was a good plan except in their freewill, Abraham and Sarah didn't always choose obedience and the other nations chose to distrust this family and their strange ways as opposed to follow them. This led to 400 years of slavery in Egypt for Abraham's descendants.

With the Exodus, God broke His people out of slavery at a great cost to the Egyptians. This was when God moved from just blessing the obedient, to also punishing the wicked. The problem was that when God used draughts, floods, and even foreign armies to punish the wicked, it was hard to identify how many wicked people in a town made the town wicked, and even then the obedient, orderly people in town received the punishment because of their wicked neighbors. The opposite was also true with evil people being rewarded in obedient, orderly towns.

It seemed no matter what God did, the people of earth persisted in their own selfish ways, making creation submit to them while failing to submit to God. Soon the debt of evil in individuals' ledgers as well as humanity's ledger had built up to deserve significant punishment to the point of death. No matter what God did, creation remained broken, defined by people's broken relationship with God, each other and themselves. Because of their radical selfishness, what human's control continues turning toward chaos as opposed to order.

God was in a quandary. This brokenness hurt. It was hurting God, hurting people, and hurting creation. There needed to be a way to reestablish order. There needed to be a way to somehow make amends for all the brokenness. Just pretending the evil didn't happen doesn't help. God tried that first. There needed to be a cost, there needed to be a buy-in, there needed to be a price paid to make things right. The people's evils have been so great that they deserve the death penalty, but God already tried that with the flood. How can there be just consequences for human disobedience while not destroying creation again. There was no answer, but God couldn't give up. There was too much at stake. God and humanity needed to be reconciled. They needed to be reconciled in a way that brought order.

That is when God sent Jesus. God showed up on earth in Jesus who was somehow 100% human and 100% divine. Yea, if athletes can give 110%, then I can have a 200% Son of God. God coming to earth not only let us know we are never really alone in this world as well as teaching us more about God and more about ourselves, but in Jesus, God went to the cross. Verse 21 of our reading says, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus lived His life in order, never bowing to chaos and selfishness, but living under God's ways, pleasing God in all that He did. Therefore, He did not

deserve the death penalty that individuals and humanity as a whole deserved. Yet He endured it through the cross. What Jesus did on the cross was say to us, "I got this. I am going to pay the debt that you owe. I am going to clear your ledger. I will take on all your sin and pay for it right here. I am going to make things right with you and God again by dying in your place." But you have to accept it. God provided the sacrifice, God accepted the peace offering, God has done all the work of reconciliation, but we still need to accept the terms. Accepting it not only means accepting Jesus as our Savior who died for our sins, but also accepting Him as Lord. In other words, accepting our place in God's order; accepting we are less than God, under God, not as smart or strong or wise as God; accepting we are under God. Accepting Jesus means accepting His ways as truth and not pretending to know better. We come home to God on God's terms. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is what makes all that possible because it pays the debt that we owe and allows us to come home again, to live in God's house, under God's rules, and find joy unspeakable.

Without accepting Jesus and what He did on the cross, we are not covered by His sacrifice. Therefore, our ledger is still full of the evil we have done and the consequences we deserve. If we accept Jesus as our Savior for what He did on the cross, but don't take Him as our Lord and put our lives in order, then the ledger just starts to fill up again. The cross makes the way to God by paying for our sins, which is something we could never do, but putting our lives in order under God, is something we can do, or at least strive to do. Accepting God's gift of Jesus and His sacrifice as well as putting our lives in order under God leads to healing the brokenness, reconciliation and life.