

God and sinners reconciled * Colossians 1:15-23
December 12, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I've had so much fun playing 'name that carol' that we're going to do it again - but with a twist this time. Instead of giving you the music like I did before, I'm going to read you some lyrics and I'm going to see if you can tell me where they're from.

Very God, begotten not created.
Let every heart prepare Him room.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel
Born that man no more may die

As wonderful as our collection of Christmas carols is, when it comes to deep, meaningful reflection on what Christmas is all about, I don't think you can do better than 'Hark the herald angels sing.' I remember once hearing it play in a grocery store in Hamilton and having this little spiritual moment of worship in the freezer aisle as all these truths about Christmas played through the store. And I thought 'man, if only people had ears to hear what was being said.' Because Hark the herald angels sing says some very important things.

But at the top of the list is our line for today, a line that very succinctly sums up what Christmas is all about – God and sinners reconciled.

The baby in the manger, the angels singing 'peace on earth, good will to men;' it's all comes down to this – God and sinners reconciled.

To think about what that means, I want to take you to Colossians 1, starting in verse 15. Colossians 1 says a lot about reconciliation and so we're going to spend our time looking at it today. Colossians 1:15.

Colossians 1, starting in verse 15, starts where we spent most of our time last week. This is all about the Word of the Father now in flesh appearing. Just listen to it.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Truly God, begotten, not created, sent to show us what God is like).

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (That's an echo of John 1).

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (He is the Word, the LOGOS).

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

This is all about the Incarnation – the Son of God taking on human flesh, becoming like us, to show us what the Father is like. 'All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Him' so that by looking at Jesus, we can see what God is really like.

But that's not all He came to do. Look again at verse 19 –

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Jesus didn't just come to show us what God was like; Jesus came to reconcile us back to God. Jesus came to restore us to God, to restore us to the relationship with God that we were meant to have. And not just us, Jesus came to reconcile all things back to God, and to restore all things to the way they were when God made everything 'very good,' in the beginning. Through Jesus, God reconciled all things to Himself.

But that kind of begs the question – why did all things need reconciling? Do we need to be reconciled to God?

Well, let's see what it says. Verse 21 - 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Our culture has a very low view of sin, if any. The general consensus is, 'everything is ok as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else.'

But that's not how God sees it. Any action that runs counter to His will, any thought that runs counter to His good purposes, they separate us from Him. When we don't pay much mind to who God is or what He says is good, we end up wandering away from God. We cause a breach in our relationship with our Creator. We make ourselves His enemies. And that's a problem because He alone is the only source of life in this world. And so we end up alienated from God, separated from Him, because we chose to go our own way.

And that's why, when we do something we know is wrong, our consciences sting. I remember so many times doing something I knew was wrong, and feeling the sting of guilt in my heart because I'd done my Creator wrong. I sensed the breach, the separation from God that I myself had caused. And my human nature made me think 'surely I can make it up to God. What can I do to make things right?' But try as I might, I never could. All my good deeds were like trying to fill in the ocean with a couple of pebbles. That's just how great this separation is – so great that we could never make a way back to God.

But God is so full of love, so rich in mercy that He chose to do something about it. He made a way when we never could. Verse 22 -

22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

God did what we could not. He bridged the chasm; He mended the breach; He made a way for us to come home to Him. Through Jesus' death on the Cross, He restored us to Himself.

Now that kind of begs the question – how does that work? How does Jesus' death restore me to God? Well, let me put it to you like this.

Think for a moment about some conflict that you've had with another person; some reason that there is a breach in relationship between you and them. Got it in your head? Good. Now what's it going to take to restore the relationship between you and them? It's going to take sacrifice, isn't it? Either they're going to have to humble themselves to admit they were wrong and repay the debt, or you're going to have to sacrifice and repay that debt yourself. To forgive them, you're going to have to bear the cost of their wrongdoing.

And that's what God did when He reconciled us to Himself. Instead of making us bear the weight of sin, God came in the person of His Son Jesus to bear that sin for us. He paid the price that we never could. And He died on the Cross, the death that we deserved, so that we could be forgiven and restored to relationship with God. His sacrifice reconciled us to God and made us holy and blameless before Him. God and sinners reconciled, just like the carol says.

And the best part is, this is all a gift. Look at who's doing all the work in this story – verse 20 – GOD reconciled all things to Himself; verse 22 – GOD has reconciled us, through CHRIST's body – not our good works – so that HE could present us holy and blameless in His sight. It's not like God said – 'Ok, I've got five slots for reconciliation up for the person with the most good deeds.' WE were alienated from God; WE were His enemies, but God moved first to reconcile us to Himself. And verse 19 says – it pleased Him to do so! God was HAPPY to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus so that He could give the gift of reconciliation to all people.

So the question is – what are you doing with that gift?

We've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. We've all been enemies of God, separated from Him. 8 But (Romans 5:8) God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. At Christmas, Jesus came to earth so that He could extend to each and every one of us the gift of reconciliation; what are you doing with that gift?

There's another passage in the NT that says a lot about reconciliation; that's 2 Corinthians 5, starting in verse 18. There Paul writes:

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Have the humility to admit, 'yes Lord, I've turned my back on You' and then receive the forgiveness and renewal that Jesus is offering. Jesus gave up the riches of Heaven, came to earth as a baby in a dingy old stable, died on a Cross to restore you to God; take hold of the gift that He is giving to you.

And THEN, take the next step and apply that reconciliation in your life. Reconciliation is not a gift to be put up on the shelf and forgotten about. Reconciliation is a gift that's meant to be applied.

Paul says as much in Colossians 1:22-23 – picking up where we left off. Verse 22, Paul says –

22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--

23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

It's no good to get a gift and throw it in the closet; if you really appreciate it, you're going to keep it out and use it the way it was intended. The gift of reconciliation is meant to be used, in inspire holy living, to move you to stand firm in the hope of the Gospel.

The gift of reconciliation is meant to be used in your life – and I think that there are two pretty clear applications –

First is the holy living that Paul talks about in Colossians 1. If you have received the gift of reconciliation, then you are holy, blameless, free from accusation. So keep living in a way that is holy, blameless and free from accusation. It won't do to get a brand new start and then go back to living the life you did before. Being reconciled to God means standing firm in the gift that you've been given and living in a way that is consistent with the character of the God who has restored you to Himself. Apply the gift of reconciliation by standing firm in the faith.

And second, apply the gift of reconciliation by extending it to others. Like Paul says over in 2 Corinthians, reconciliation is not meant to stop with us. If there is some breach between you and another person, let God's gift of reconciliation to you move you to extend reconciliation to them. There's a quotation out there that says 'Christians should be the most forgiving people' and it's right – if we've experienced the generous forgiveness of God, then we should be willing to generously extend that forgiveness to others. Certainly, be smart about it; you don't want to enable someone else to keep sinning against, but at the same time, it just won't do to hold a grudge where the possibility of reconciliation exists. If you can be restored to another person, extend God's reconciling love to them by forgiving them and moving on.

After all, verse 24 says that Christ reconciled all things to Himself – not just individuals but social structures and racial tensions and environmental issues. Everything will ultimately be 'set right' and characterized by peace when Jesus returns, and we can be the advance guard doing what we can to bring reconciliation in each of those circumstances.

Hark! The herald angels sing is right – God and sinners ARE reconciled. In fact, I read this week that Charles Wesley wrote these words within the first year of his coming to faith. God and Charles Wesley were reconciled and within a year, he wrote this song. God and you can be; God and you are reconciled. Put the gift of reconciliation to work in your life. Let's pray.

BENEDICTION

2 Cor. 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.