

SERMON DELIVERED AT THE SUNDAY SERVICE

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 on
 2 Cor. 5, 15-21

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2 Cor. 5, 15-21: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Dear Brethren and Friends in Christ Jesus!

Each of the various church bodies of our land has one or more of its own distinctive doctrines which sets it apart from other denominations. The Church of Rome is known and wants to be known as the body which holds that there is to be no separation between church and state because it holds the Pope to be the visible head not only of Christendom, but also of the governments of the world. Ask an informed Baptist what dogma his church body confesses before all others and he will tell you that Baptists insist that unless a person has been immersed, he has not been properly baptized. Turn to a Methodist, and he will say, if he knows a bit about the position of his church body, that Methodists hold that a Christian can and should reach the stage in sanctification where he no longer sins, but is perfect in his life and conduct. The members of the Church of Christ insist that it is wrong for a congregation in its public services to use instrumental music such as an organ to accompany the singing, but that all singing must be "a cappella!" Presbyterians, as followers of Calvin, hold that in the doctrine of election and predestination one must understand that God did not choose a certain definite number to reach eternal life, but according to His sovereign will passed by some of the children of men. The great majority of so-called Lutherans declare that the election of God took place "in view of faith", that is, that God knew from eternity just who would and who would not believe the Gospel, and elected those only of whom He knew beforehand that they would believe, unto everlasting life.

These are just examples of the many distinctive doctrines and dogmas of the various church bodies of our land. What fills us with sadness is that they are all utterly opposed to Scripture and must be included among the teachings of which our dear Savior says, "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matt.15: 9.

How about our church body, whose clerical and lay representatives are present at this convention? Do we have any distinctive doctrines? Should someone, a stranger perhaps, pass by our meeting place today and ask, "What do you believe and teach in matters pertaining to religion,"

what should we reply? We might well say, "Yes, we also have distinctive teachings, which identify and distinguish us from other church bodies." And that would be right. And which are they? To state them in brief we could tell such a stranger that our distinctive doctrines are summarized and comprehended briefly in the motto of all true Lutherans: "Only Scripture, Only Grace, Only Faith." And by way of explanation we would add: Only Scripture means that in all matters pertaining to doctrine and life, all human opinions and judgments must be set aside and only the clear, inerrant, infallible verbally inspired Word of God as contained in the canonical books of the Bible are the source and foundation. Only Grace means that man is utterly helpless to contribute anything toward his salvation, but that God alone has done it all through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His only Son, through His holy life and His innocent and bitter sufferings and death --- all as a gift of undeserved goodness and love. Only Faith means that it is alone by faith, which is a simple trusting of God's promises, the empty hand by which man makes them his own, that these treasures of grace in Christ become man's very own, for time and eternity. And thank God, such a confession would be true because it is not founded on man's reason or wisdom, but only on the veritable Truth that God Himself has so graciously revealed to us in the pages of our Bible.

In today's text we have a summary of these distinctive doctrines of our Church Body displayed in words which were written by the Apostle Paul. As we now turn our thoughts and meditation to them, let us listen devoutly as God Himself instructs us concerning

THE PEACE WHICH HE HAS ESTABLISHED WITH THE ENTIRE WORLD

- We note:
- I. Wherein this peace consists.
 - II. How it was accomplished.
 - III. The privileges of those who partake of it.

I.

While man himself has much to do with the peace that is established between nations previously at war, he has nothing at all to do with the peace established between God and man. This peace has been wrought by God alone. Our text puts it thus: "God ... hath reconciled us to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ... For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

According to our text the peace which God has wrought between Himself and men consists in naught else save the forgiveness of sins. Note carefully the words "not imputing their trespasses unto them." Although God, according to the Law, looking down from heaven sees nothing else than a whole world of sinners, declaring of them all without exception, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one"; "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy"; "There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not," nevertheless, God does not impute their trespasses -- He does not charge them against them - but forgives them all their sins. And as a result of that they are now righteous (v.21), forgiven. Other statements of Scripture declaring the same gracious truth put it thus: God remembers our sins no more. He casts them behind His back. He wipes them out. They are blotted out.

This is also the blessed truth expressly taught in the accounts of Scripture known as the Great Supper and the Marriage of the King's Son. Both of these parables tell of a supper that was all prepared, nothing was lacking, not the slightest detail, and that is a picture, and a true one,

of the wondrous peace which God has established, even the forgiveness of sins, as His gift of grace to the whole world.

That then is wherein the peace of which our text speaks consists -- in the most precious treasure a sinner can know -- the forgiveness of sins. Let us cherish it, not permit any to rob us of it.

In outer Christendom, sad to say, those who cling to claims of work-righteousness, vehemently oppose this precious truth. Rome says: No, God is not at peace with the world. Rome places her most vicious curse and anathema on the doctrine that God does not charge or impute the sins and trespasses of men to them. Rome teaches that God goes only so far as to give man power to co-operate with Him in obtaining forgiveness and that it is obtainable only through the church of the Pope and his underlings. Arminians, i.e., Methodists, Pentecostals and related groups, insist that man can even take some steps toward God before God approaches him, thus destroying this precious doctrine of objective justification that God has done it all by Himself, and that His forgiveness is already complete. Calvinists - Presbyterians and Baptists especially - hold that God has perhaps made peace with some, but not with all -- that some are elected by God to damnation.

Friends, let us be on our guard against all these soul-destroying errors and ask God for continued grace to believe just what He says here: that He is indeed reconciled with the whole world. Meanwhile let us pray Him for grace to keep us from falling into the error of which the majority of so-called Lutherans in the world is guilty, that God is not quite ready to forgive the sins of men, but withholds His forgiveness until He sees whether or not man will accept it. This terrible teaching which goes under the name of "intuitu fidei" overthrows the entire teaching of our text that God already is reconciled with the whole world, and that this forgiveness remains intact and complete, and that the only way this righteousness can be lost is through ignorance or unbelief.

II.

And how did God Himself accomplish and provide this objective justification, this peace and reconciliation between Himself and the world? It was accomplished at a terrific cost and price, the greatest cost ever paid, the highest sacrifice known to men. Our text clearly states the manner in which the Triune God wrought this peace, especially in two words -- but oh, what meaningful precious words they are! It says that God reconciled the world unto Himself "IN CHRIST." The price that was paid was naught else than the gift of God's only-begotten Son. Because of His infinite love the only-begotten Son, the second Person of the Trinity, took upon Himself the burden of paying for the sins of the whole world. That is why He was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, so that He might become partaker of our nature, become true man so that He might suffer and die for the sins of the world. This cost and price is described thus by Peter: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1, 18-19. Paul states it in these words: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8:9. "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. 2: 5-8.

Ponder the Passion Story and there you will also see what a tremen-

dous sacrifice and price it cost our Savior; a cost, price, and sacrifice so fearful, so shameful and painful, that in the Garden, just before it was to be completed, the Son prayed the Father several times: "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done!"

Dear friends, let us hold the two words "in Christ" very dear. Except for them, God would not be at peace with the world. Except for them, not God's love, nor His grace, nor His mercy, nor His forgiveness would rest upon the world but only His eternal wrath and punishment. Those pastors, priests, rabbis, and lay people who speak of God being a forgiving God apart from Christ, commit a terrible sin, for except for this supreme Sacrifice of the Savior on behalf of all sinners in the world, God would be and forever remain to all men a consuming fire to execute wrath and judgment upon all that do evil, and that would include you and me.

Brethren, let us pray God for grace to accept this truth that God forgives only for Christ's sake, the most wonderful truth that a man can possibly hear, and cling to it all the days of our life, for then the purpose, for which God has charged His ambassadors to proclaim it, will be accomplished, and we shall inherit eternal life.

III.

This blessed truth that God has established peace, even the forgiveness of sins, without money and price for us, through Christ and His blood, lays a solemn obligation upon us. It is not an obligation of the Law, but rather of the Gospel. Actually, God's dear children will not consider it an obligation at all, but rather a blessed privilege. What is it? Listen to our text again. It says: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again."

That is our privilege -- just to live unto Christ. Surely, when we hear, as we do, not only today, but in all our teachings, Sunday after Sunday, in Sunday School, in instruction, in meetings, this one message of reconciliation, the Gospel of Christ, of the cost He paid for our redemption, whereby He has broken down every barrier and thrown open wide the doors of heaven, should not the response of our hearts be: "Oh, for such a Friend and Savior, I want to live just as He directs? In my daily life it is not my will, not my wants and desires, but His will that I want to perform as a daily thank offering?" Surely, that is the determination in the heart of everyone who cherishes faith in the Savior, even as Luther has penned it in the incomparable words of the explanation of the Second Article: "That I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

We have been requested, in our sermon, to devote a paragraph to the building in which this service, all thanks to God, is being held today. By God's grace we are holding our sessions in the chapel of the building which Christ Lutheran Church acquired with the aid of our Conference last November. This building, besides providing the congregation with the necessary quarters for its church and parsonage, adequately provides a separate room also for the first seminary of our Conference. This house of God, which includes the church, parsonage, and seminary, is being dedicated in this service. What shall we say on this memorable occasion? Briefly we would say this: the beauty of this building, so well suited for the present needs of our little conference and that of Christ Congregation, consists not in things that we can see with our bodily eyes. The beauty of this edifice before God consists in this, that in all the preaching and in the instruction here given for the congregation and for our prospective pastors and

teachers, this teaching of our text shall have first and foremost place; namely, that God is fully reconciled with the whole sinful world in Christ! Nor is that all. Not only must first place be given to the preaching and teaching based on this chief article of Scripture, it also dare not be compromised! Should it ever come to pass, which may God graciously forbid, that the word of reconciliation is taught as one doctrine, but along side of it doctrines that are not in harmony with Scripture; - in other words, should truth and error be given equal right in the proclamation of the Word from this pulpit or in the instruction classes conducted in this seminary, then it were far better that the foundation and walls of this building crumble into dust and ashes. Should that come to pass, then it might indeed still be known to men as a Lutheran church and a Lutheran seminary, but before God it would have forfeited its right of existence, inasmuch as the three great truths of true Christendom - Only the Bible, Only Grace, and Only Faith - would have been corrupted, and man's commandments and doctrines replaced those of God and His Word.

Friends, that I can preach and that you can hear a sermon on this precious text, which has set forth the chief and distinctive teachings of God's Word and of our dear Concordia Lutheran Conference, is a wondrous gift of God's boundless grace. May He Himself help us all, through Word and Sacrament, to cling to these teachings, to confess them, to sacrifice for them, and to defend them until the blessings of God's reconciliation which are now ours by faith are graciously transformed into the complete and perfect joys of heaven.

Amen.