

The Cross of Christ: The Reconciliation of God

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Date: 22 October 2000

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[0 : 00] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada. You are free to use this mp3 audio file and to redistribute it to others without alteration and without charge. After the sermon, listen for more information about St.

John's Shaughnessy Church and the St. John's website. The following message is from the October 22, 2000 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend David Short delivered his message from the book of Romans, the fifth chapter, verses 8 to 11. The title of the message is The Cross of Christ, the Reconciliation of God. Again, a welcome to you to St. John's, and especially if you're visiting with someone, the normal way that God speaks to us is through his word.

And so I invite you to take the green leaflet and open back to the second page, the words of the reading from Romans 5. This week Bron and I received a letter from a friend of ours in Australia lamenting her loneliness and isolation. And about two thirds of the letter was filled with her feeling guilty about feeling isolated and lonely. It's a very complicated letter.

She's part of a close family. She's healthy and has a great job. She participates in a couple of groups that meet weekly designed for mutual encouragement and support. And yet she articulates, I think, what is true for many, if not most of us, that there is a sea change in the way we relate to one another which is making friendship more and more difficult. And I don't think it's enough to point to our long term exposure to advertising as though somehow we are the passive victims of creative brilliance. I think it's more that we have created for ourselves a consumer mentality, which has made us into option addicts. Technology in the marketplace now works on us at the level of our imagination. All that really matters can be bought and sold. Life is now a series of consumer choices.

Actually lifestyle is what we talk about, not life. And I think that has a corrosive effect on our friendships. Relationship commitments today are based not on mutual belonging but on mutual benefit. They're not based on covenant, but on economics. They're not based on a sense of fidelity, but on a utilitarian and economic view of the other person.

[3 : 12] We want more and more from our relationships, but are willing to give less and less. And so friendship is based and is now not so much about commitment and community, but about usefulness and advantage. So my friendship or my commitment to you can be broken when the relationship is no longer to my advantage. And this translates in the area of romance into what the sociologists are now calling commitment avoidance.

And you know that in North America the one thing that is the metaphor for romance is the remote control. I want to have control but at a safe distance. And in church life, when we haven't escaped this, Jonathan Sachs who is the chief rabbi for the British Commonwealth says that belonging to a religious community these days is no longer so much about pursuing salvation. It's become a branch of the leisure industry.

And we've been transformed from pilgrims into tourists. Which makes me a tour guide. The reason I'm telling you this is, I think more importantly in all these things, it affects the way we think about God.

If I was to take a poll of each of us in the building this morning and I was to ask you if you believed in a loving God, I suppose most of your answers would be yes. But if I was to ask you if you were confident, whether you were confident that God really loved you in such a way that you were able to trust Him completely and give Him unqualified access to every area of your life, we may find a very different answer coming back. The problem is that we are so used to being treated economically and treating others as useful and treating God in that way, that it's next to impossible to imagine that God should treat us in any different way.

And we bring to our relationship with God an awful suspicion and mistrust that He's not really interested in our best. It's just easier to hide from Him. Because if we open ourselves to Him, we might find out that He's out to get us.

[5 : 26] Or to spoil our fun. Or to interfere with our life goals. Or to make us less than we can be. And that's why it's so important for us to look at this passage from Romans 5, which comes to us from the pen of the Apostle Paul.

If you look at verse 8, the theme and flavour of the whole passage is God's love for us. You see verse 8, God proves His love for us in this, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And in the original it reads, God proves His own love. As though God's love is different from our love. In fact the truth is that God's love is unlike any love we've experienced or any love that we give one another.

Put most simply, it is so good it is beyond human comparison. And this word when it says God proves His love, it's not a mathematical or abstract proof. The idea behind this is that if we begin to get a glimpse of God's love, it will overwhelm us.

It will flood our hearts. It will melt our hearts and fire them with joy. And so the Apostle tells us three things about the love of God. Each one connects to the death of Jesus and each one is able to change our lives forever.

[6 : 43] And the first is this, that God's love does not depend on us. If you look down at verse 6 you see that God's love is the opposite of a self-serving economic and utilitarian love.

While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. If Jesus didn't come from heaven to earth because we asked Him to, God wasn't moved to send Jesus because of our great love for Him, nor because of any great advantage that He would get out of it, nor in response to any value or dignity or potential that He saw in us.

He loves us and He sent His Son even when we did not trust Him, even when we did not love Him, even when we did not care less about Him. In fact, He loved us even when there is discord and hostility between us and when the hostility and alienation is caused by us.

And if, as Deb read the text you are following carefully, you will notice that we are described four times in this passage. And I put the words in italics. The apostle says we are weak in verse 6 and ungodly and sinners in verse 8 and in verse 10 we are enemies.

And the apostle throws these words out almost cheerfully. Because his reason isn't to make us feel thoroughly guilty and abject, although we have a very good reason to do so. He puts these words before us because he wants us to see how brilliant the love of God is.

[8 : 12] And he needs to face the facts about us before he does that. The word for weak is the word sick. You see, God has never stopped loving us and yet we hide from Him and treat Him with mistrust as though His motives aren't as good as our motives.

If you had a friend and treated them like that, that would be sick. And that's why the apostle describes us ungodly. We are unlike God. Our love is calculating and always ensures we get the advantage.

But God's love is not caused by anything in us nor by anything He gains from us. And yet day by day and hour by hour and week by week He showers His gifts upon us.

And don't you find the colours in the trees during the fall remarkable and wonderful? Those colours and the ability to see them are both gifts from God.

Have you stopped to thank Him? We enjoy the blessings of God constantly but instead of thanking Him we get instantly angry. If anything comes in our way of enjoying them, we are ungodly.

[9 : 23] But here's the point. It's for the ungodly that Christ died. And when it comes to the word sinner in verse 8, it's been my experience that the only people who are offended by being called sinners are those who think they are better than others.

The idea of sin takes our daily behaviour and the way that we work and puts it into the context of our relationship with God. And in the Bible sin isn't confined to murder and torture and terrorism. It's the basic attitude of putting me at the centre. Of making me the reference point. One of the clearest ways it shows it is when it comes to making real decisions.

I become the expert in what's going to be for my advantage. Yeah, if it helps my friends as a by-product, well and good. But what God thinks about this and what God says is right and what God says is wrong very rarely gets a look in.

We treat God economically. We refer to Him when it is useful for us to do so. We ignore His love and then we're in trouble. We quickly ask for His help. That is why the Apostle ends by calling us His enemies.

[10:28] Fundamentally we resent God being God. We have a deep-seated resentment and resistance to living life on His terms. Although He made us and although He has not stopped loving us for a second, we feel we need to decide what is right and wrong.

After all we are in a much better position than He is. And it's very fortunate for God that we agree with Him on so much. But when we disagree with God, He is conveniently forgotten so that we can play God for a while.

Now why does the Apostle labour this? It is to show the wonder of God's love. That God's love is not based on our goodness.

That God's love is not based on our performance. And do you know what? You can measure someone's love by who they love. And the measure and wonder of God's love is that it is entirely unlike ours.

There is nothing self-serving. God's love reaches out and embraces us while we were still treating Him as an enemy. He does not stop loving us despite our ignoring Him and mistrusting Him and disobeying Him.

[11:40] God's love doesn't depend on us. That's the first point. The second point the Apostle makes is that God's love costs him dearly. You see you can measure God's, you can measure anyone's love not only by who they love, but by what it costs them.

And four times our minds are drawn to this and I've underlined each reference to the death of Jesus. In verse 6 we read Christ died for the ungodly. In verse 8 Christ died for us.

In verse 9 we're justified by His blood. And in verse 10 we're reconciled through the death of His Son. The Bible makes very clear that our salvation rests on the cross of Jesus Christ.

God sent Jesus from heaven, He was born as a human, He lived a perfect and sinless life, He went about doing good and at the end He was crucified and executed on a Roman cross.

Why? For us. He died on our behalf. He died in our place. The cross of Jesus Christ is a mighty cosmic exchange planned by God.

[12:48] For as the innocent Jesus dies, God takes our sin and our hostility to Him and gives it to Jesus Christ. And Jesus Himself bears our sin in our place, on our behalf, in His body and dies.

All those things we've done to reject the love of God, Jesus takes and He receives the due punishment. The sin is ours, the ungodliness is ours, the pain is His.

And that is what verse 8 means. It is remarkable, it's almost too good to be true, that the hostility that we are responsible for, that deserves God's right anger, God puts away in the death of His Son. There is nothing to commend us to God. We were without spiritual ability. We were unlike God in disobedience. We were sinners against the majesty of God. But here is the amazing part.

It was while we were like that, that God so loved us and gave Jesus to die for us. And every now and again you'll read in the newspapers a remarkable story of someone who dies seeking to rescue someone, a child or another person.

[13:58] We honour that heroism. But here is the wonder of God's love. He gives the life of His Son to die while we are enemies.

I have two children and I can't imagine anything in this world that I would give their lives for. But God's love is such that He gives the life of His Son for us when we were turned away from Him. I've used this illustration before at St John's but it is a good one. My uncle Steve was captured in the Second World War and imprisoned in Changi. And those of you who are in the older generation will know that many Canadians and many Australians died in that prisoner of war camp.

Each day they were fed with a small scoop of rice. And every second day they were given another scoop of rice and a bit of gravy. And some of the men would save the first scoop of rice from one day, get a second scoop of rice and gravy and make a bit of a meal of it every second day.

And nobody took anybody else's food because it was their lifeline. And Steve says that one night after lights out he was lying there awake and a fellow who was sleeping opposite him sat up and looked around in the dark to see that nobody was looking.

[15:13] And he had been collecting his rice and his neighbour had been collecting his rice. And he picked up his neighbour's bowl and his own bowl and instead of taking and stealing his neighbour's rice, he took his rice and put it in his neighbour's bowl.

And Steve said when they woke up in the morning the fellow who had given his rice away had died. He knew he was dying and he gave away his food so that his friend might live.

And it's a wonderful and moving story but here is the question. Is God's love like that? And the answer is no. That man gave his life for a friend.

But God's love is so marvellous and so wonderful he gives the life of his son for us. While we were enemies. While we were still opposed to him.

While we couldn't care less. He gave the life of his precious son to die in our place. Which brings us to the third point which is an obvious point.

[16:12] And that is that God wants us as his friends. If you look down in verses 10 to 11, three times we are told that the reason God has done this is that he wants us to be reconciled to him.

The heart of the Christian faith is not a bunch of rules. The heart of the Christian faith is not essentially about how we behave. The heart of the Christian faith is a relationship where we come back into friendship with God.

Do you know this is entirely unknown in all the world religions. The idea that God should be interested in a daily friendship with each one of us is unknown and alien in pagan religions.

The fact that he is willing to die to make that friendship possible has always been a scandal. But the wonderful thing is that in the death of Jesus, God doesn't just forgive us.

But he opens the door for the beginning of a friendship which will last all our life and beyond into the world to come. The death of Jesus has created a new situation for us.

[17:18] Each one of us has treated God economically. Each one of us has dealt with him when it proved useful. We've trusted him less than a person, certainly less than a friend.

But God has not ceased loving us. He continued to love us when we played at being God. He gave his son for us because he desires friendship with us.

And that is why the cross of Jesus Christ is so important for us as Christians. I mean imagine a woman who after a number of years of marriage, her husband leaves her for a younger woman.

And leaves her with a mortgage and the children. And after a few months he comes back and knocks on the door and asks if she will take him back. And what does she do?

She could say to him, go to hell. And she would be completely just in doing so. It would be just but the relationship would be at an end.

[18:19] But what if she still loves him? What does she have to do if the relationship is to continue? The answer is not to deny it, to pretend it isn't there, to be indifferent to what's happened.

That's not love. If there is going to be restoration, the pain and the anger and the hurt cannot be denied. But they have to be digested. And this is something that the genuine power of love is able to do.

Despite the furious anger and the deep hurt, love is able to digest them and absorb them and open the possibility of reconciliation. If there is going to be a relationship, she has to bear the anger and pain.

She has to digest it and absorb it in herself. And that is what has happened on the cross. On the cross it is God who plums the inner resources of his heart and quenches his own righteous anger. It is on the cross that God in Christ accepts and bears and absorbs the pain that we caused and opens a way for us to be reconciled.

[19:27] You see, for God and us to become friends and to be reconciled, two things need to be dealt with. Our disregard and our disrespect for God and his righteous anger.

And in the cross of Jesus Christ, God has dealt with his righteous anger. He has loved us through that right anger and acted to bear the pain of our hostility. But it takes two to be reconciled and it doesn't just happen automatically.

True reconciliation with God, like true reconciliation with one another, isn't just burying the hatchet and pretending everything is okay. There is no reconciliation until the truth is told, until we acknowledge the wrong that has been done.

God has done all to reconcile himself to us. All that remains is for us to be reconciled to him. This means doing two things.

The first is turning around. Recognising that we have treated God like an enemy. Asking him to forgive us and to turn us into a friend. And secondly it means trusting him.

[20:31] Acknowledging that Jesus died for you. Placing your trust in his love for you. And I am going to finish in a moment with a prayer for those who want to be reconciled to God.

To be reconciled means taking and making a movement on your part. To recognise your weakness and ungodliness. And to see in Jesus Christ and in his death the magnificent love of God for you. To turn away from your hostility. And to return to friendship with God. His love is real. And his forgiveness is available. He loved you and I before we knew it.

He gave his son to die for us. And he loves you still today. And he invites you and I to turn to him and to trust him. If you want to open your life to his love and friendship.

Why don't you pray with me in the quietness of your own heart. As we bow our heads now.

Heavenly Father, I admit that I have treated you as an enemy.

[21 : 37] I need your forgiveness. Thank you for loving me and sending Jesus to die for me. I want to be reconciled to you.

Please forgive me and change me. And be my God. Amen. Amen.

Thank Jarsand is completely forgiven. To be judged by yourself. I labeled this touch of Jesus among them was ■ pillar people. And you can read this through healing. And look forward to journaling. To fiscal purpose, every iron Christian. That address is www.stjohns.org.

On the website, you will also find information about ministries, worship services, and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy. We hope that this sermon on the web has helped you, and that you will share it with others.

Thank you.