

Good Friday Service April 18, 2014

Colossians 1:19-23a

For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.

Why do you need to be reconciled? Because: You were (God's) enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. We were alienated from God, separated, enemies. Your evil thoughts and actions did not reveal ignorance or indifference, but hostility toward God. You were a stranger to God's way of thinking. When people are not in harmony with God they are hostile to His standards. So they need to be reconciled to God, but there is nothing we can do to make reconciliation with God possible.

So how are you reconciled? Here's the good news, God has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Jesus. Since Jesus as perfect God faced death we can be sure that His sacrifice was complete and truly removes our sin. Jesus is both human and divine. As a man He took the punishment for our sin and suffered an agonizing death. Jesus is also God, so that in Jesus God identified with our sin, meeting it head-on at the cross, taking the total punishment (death) and breaking its power over humanity.

Why? What did His sacrifice do? As a result, He has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. (v22)

No one is good enough to save themselves. We must depend totally on God's grace. This is true no matter who we are or what we've done. We have all sinned repeatedly, and *any* sin requires us to come to Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life. Apart from Christ, there is no way for us to be forgiven.

But in Christ we are made new, brought into the presence of God, holy, blameless, without fault. Accepted by grace through faith.

Someone has said, "We can be who we are because we have nothing left to prove." In other words Jesus' death shows us how much God loves us; it is by His death and His

death alone that we are able to be in God's presence, holy and without fault. Knowing that we stand before God as His beloved, because of Christ, frees us to explore the dishonest and disturbing aspects of who we are. We can face the truth about ourselves. We can reflect about it honestly, pray about it, and even talk to others about it freely. Sinful patterns in our life do not surprise God or threaten our standing with Him. He loves us because of Christ's flawlessness, not ours. You no longer need to "keep up appearances" with yourself, God, or anyone else because Christ's righteousness is applied to your account and is the foundation of your self-concept.

Because of Jesus you can be who you are. You don't have to deceive others. Because of Jesus and only by His death do we experience salvation and wholeness. That is not an excuse to live carelessly. (v23) You must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.

When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant not guilty, the person has been acquitted of all the accusations or charges. Legally, it is as if he or she had never been accused. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From His perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. God's solution is available to you. No matter what you have done or what you have been like in the past, God's forgiveness is for you.

But, many Christians do a good job of looking good on the outside, while below the surface are things they are hiding. All we have to do is admit our sin, ask God for forgiveness, and humbly, and gratefully accept His grace. That's it. It's that easy, of course you must be sincere, but it is as easy as admitting sin, asking forgiveness, and walking away joyfully. Yet, many hide sin in their life. Many here tonight look like good, religious, Christian people, followers of Christ. But below the surface that we can't see you are involved in sin. Why do we hide it? Because we are dishonest.

God has given us His Son, and He has given us the Good News to create a safe environment to look beneath the surface and admit what is there. You don't have to prove that you are lovable or valuable. You don't have to be right all the time. You can be vulnerable, you can be yourself even if others don't accept you. Why? Because God sees below the surface what you try to hide from others, and He utterly, totally loves you in Christ. Our relationship with God is not determined by our past or present record or performance. It is Jesus' past record that has been credited to our account.

So as you open up and are honest with yourself, God and others it may feel like death, like walking a tightrope discovering and admitting the unpleasant things about yourself, but you have a safety net, the Cross and the Good News of Jesus Christ.