

Come and Be Reconciled; Go and Be Reconciled

Ash Wednesday 2018

Pastor Josh Frazee

Various texts

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Go and Be Reconciled: What Does This Mean?” That’s the theme we’re using for our Lenten rotation this year. It comes from a booklet put out by Ambassadors for Reconciliation, and it covers several concepts. Because of the nature of our rotation, with each pastor selecting a topic to preach on and then taking that same one to each church, our topics will not be in order, so tonight, we’ll do a quick outline of how these topics work with one another.

The first thing we do as we desire to be reconciled to God and to one another is that we “Remember Whose (We) Are.” The apostle John encourages us to “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” As the children of God, “the world does not know us.” This is because “it did not know him.” We have been called by our Lord Jesus out of the patterns of this world into His perfect pattern: the pattern of being children of the Father, just as He Himself is the Son of God.

Next, we “Repent before God.” We cannot live as God’s dear children because we are poor, miserable sinners. That’s why we wear the ashes on our brows tonight. We recognize that we are from dust, and to dust we shall return. Because we are sinners, we will die. That’s what our sin deserves: death. But not just physical, temporary death. Rather we deserve physical *and* spiritual *eternal* death. Therefore we repent, knowing that “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart (God) will not despise.”

In order to reconcile with each other, though, we must first be able to accept that we have been reconciled to God our Father. So we come. We come to the Lord’s house to hear the proclamation of God’s Word—the focus of which is the forgiveness of sins we have received on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came to the earth as God manifested in human flesh to bear the sins we have committed and the good we have omitted on the cross for our salvation. So first we come and hear that we are reconciled to God by His Son’s death on the cross of Calvary, the very death He has been walking toward since we heard about His birth back at Christmas.

By Jesus’ death on the cross, our sins have been paid for; but we do not receive that forgiveness without faith—the faith which is only created and sustained in us by hearing God’s Word regularly. So “Receive God’s Forgiveness.” Come, and hear. Come, and be reconciled to God by His Son’s work on the cross.

As ones who have faith being worked in us by the hearing of God’s Word, we believe what God has said to us through His Word: that “If we confess our sins, (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” As ones with faith, we know that God does not lie. He does not renege on His promises. He has promised that if we confess, He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And with our sins forgiven, we may go and be reconciled with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The first step in being reconciled *to each other* may sound very familiar to what we just heard: we “Confess to the Other Person.” God commands through James “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” As in a school project, both parties in a conflict will receive either full punishment or full success. Both students in a school project receive either the “F” or the “A”, depending on if they can work together well. The same is true in reconciliation. Both parties are at fault when conflict occurs, and both need to confess to each other.

Too often at this point it is easy to fall into Satan’s trap: to believe that the person you are having a conflict with owes you something. Here we need to pause and consider: has anything your neighbor done to you taken away your gift of eternal life? Has what the other person done taken away the forgiveness of sins you have in your Savior, Jesus Christ?

Though you were enemies of God, God came to save you from your sins through His Son. Jesus has gone to the cross to pay for your sins; that’s what we hear about throughout this season of Lent, and what we remember everyday of our lives as Christians.

“Put on, then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” That’s the next thing we do in reconciling with one another: we “Forgive as God Forgave (Us).”

It is not that we either were or are so perfect or so right that we didn’t need to be forgiven. We did. And now that we have forgiveness in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we can forgive others as God has forgiven us. Sometimes that is much easier to do than others. Sometimes all it takes is saying “I’m sorry,” and the forgiveness is easy to give. Other times, it is much, much harder. Other times, even once the “Please forgive me” and the “I forgive you”’s are spoken, there is much healing to take place. And sometimes, knowing that words alone will not cause quick healing, it is very challenging to ask for forgiveness or to give it.

That’s what we will be hearing about this Lenten season. With each pastor you hear from over the next few weeks, you’ll hear an expansion of each of the topics we’ve covered tonight, as well as this last one: “Restore with Gentleness.”

Again, you may feel that a sin that has been committed may be very large or that it may take a good deal of time to heal. But that doesn’t excuse us from forgiving. God sent His Son to pay for our sins, and as we go with Him to the cross over the next few weeks, we’ll hear about His journey and the pain He went through to forgive us. Then we’ll know that much more how to forgive as God forgave us; and then, we’ll know that much more that “if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness(, while keeping) watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

Tonight, we bear ashes on our heads to remind us we are mortal, we will die. But we focus our eyes on the cross, which is where our Savior will, and has gone to die, so that we might live even though we die. And even though we will die, we will live, and we will live together. That’s the hope we have in our Savior Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.