

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

## Des Moines, WA

### June 29, 2014

Romans 5:6-11

#### Reconciliation is Personal

1. *Impressions of God*
2. *The Source of False Impressions*
3. *Reconciliation is Personal*
4. *The Result*

Hymns: 188 –469 – 360 – 314 Closing: 432

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

“What is your impression of God?” If you went around asking that question, you wouldn’t have to approach that many people before you would undoubtedly hear these words of description: Distant, Angry, Judgmental, Impersonal. For many people in this world, they hold a Zeus-like view of God; that God sits up in the heavens, disconnected from this world, detached from the realities of our lives, waiting to throw his bolts of lightning down on those who anger him.

While many hold that view, the irony is that the Bible - in which God doesn’t have us imagine, but actually tells us about himself – shows us a God who is very different from the distant, angry judge that many try to cast him as. As we look through the Scriptures, we hear God coming down from heaven and walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We see God coming to the tent of Abraham, and discussing his plans with him as they shared a meal. We remember God appearing to Moses and Elijah in very personal ways to give them assurance and comfort. Throughout the Bible, we are shown a God who is personal, who does not hesitate to interact with his people. We are given a God who is merciful, who showers his love on his people.

So where does this impression of God as the distant and angry judge come from? Well, this caricature of God as the lightning-throwing Judge is a direct result of our actions. God truly wants to have a personal relationship with every person that he has created, but the way we are born and the way we live makes that personal, loving God seem unimaginable.

As a result of our sin, when we first think of God, our picture of him is tainted. Our natural knowledge, our conscience, tells us that we don’t do everything

perfectly just as we should. It puts that guilt upon our shoulders. It tells us that there is someone who is bigger and stronger and better than us. We will have to stand before him; we will have to answer to him. And our own sinful actions which convict us tell us that that won’t be much fun. So, when this personal God comes to sinful mankind, what happens? Like Adam and Eve, sinners run and hide. Like Ezekiel, sinners cry out in doom, “Woe is me!” Like the shepherds out in the fields, sinners become sore afraid.

The reality is that imperfect people and perfect God don’t go together. As Isaiah says, “Our sin separates us from God.” (Isaiah 59:2) Sin has placed a large and heavy barrier between us. On one side is perfection; on the other is imperfection; we are torn apart. And it is only sinners who are to blame for that broken and tattered relationship. For that reason, we don’t want a personal God, who knows us, who is close to us. Because that is scary; it’s undesirable. So we push God away, and we label him as distant and impersonal. We push him away so that we don’t have to think about him.

That is what makes the doctrine of reconciliation so amazing, and so comforting. While we sinners, with the help of the world and the devil, try to push God away as that distant and impersonal Judge that we want to get away from; reconciliation tells us that God continues to come to us and show just how personal and loving he is.

Last week, we looked at the doctrine of atonement. While the Biblical teachings of atonement and justification take on more of a judicial sense, reconciliation is more personal. Through atonement/justification, we are told why we can stand before God the Judge and be declared, “Not Guilty!” But through the teaching of reconciliation, we are told that God wanted something much more than for us to be absolved. He also wanted that relationship that was torn apart by sin to be mended. He wanted that feeling of fear and terror in the presence of God Almighty to be done away with. He wanted that impression of God as angry and distant to be put out of our minds forever. God wanted personal reconciliation with each of us.

As Paul writes in Romans 5, his purpose is to show the Romans, and all Christians, just how personal and loving God truly is. Listen to what Paul says, *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.*

*<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath*

*through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

As you look at that section of Scripture, the premise upon which Paul builds his argument is given in verse 7: In simplest form, Paul is saying that it is rare for a person to give up their life for another person, especially for someone that they don't know or for someone that isn't worth saving. (Example: Soldier jumping on grenade for his squad mates certainly wouldn't do the same for his enemies.)

Around that premise that sacrifices for life are rare, Paul mentions a sacrifice of life three times in these six verses. Verse 6, verse 8, and verse 10 all speak about God's Son, Jesus Christ, giving up his life as a sacrifice. And each of those three times, Paul makes it clear who Jesus was personally sacrificing his life for. It was for the ungodly, sinful enemies of God. God came and personally sacrificed his life for the same people who say that God is a distant, impersonal, unloving and angry Judge. As Paul states it, something doesn't add up.

And that is precisely Paul's point in speaking about reconciliation: By its very nature, the way in which God deals with mankind and their sin destroys any legitimate argument that he is distant and impersonal. Instead, by giving his life on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners, he showed just how deeply personal he is, he showed how much he desired our relationship with him to be reconciled. Sacrifice is always personal, sacrifice is always fueled by emotion.

God did not bring forgiveness to mankind in some kind of vortex that was free from emotion. Rather, his work of forgiveness was fueled by a strong and intimate connection with us. Jesus did not die on the cross just so that we could be free from the guilt of sin; that we might breath a big sigh of relief like a cleared defendant in court. He made that sacrifice so that the barrier between us and God might be removed. He did that work so that he could have that personal relationship with us that he desired at the creation of the world. Through the work of reconciliation, God shows himself as a God who cares about his personal relationship with each one of us.

That is made clear by the message that Jesus brought to his disciples as he appeared to them after his death and resurrection. Jesus would not have been lying if he had appeared in that locked room and declared to his disciples, "Not guilty!" It was true that their sins had been paid for and they could stand

before the Judge as innocent. But Jesus' message was more personal. He said, "Peace be with you!" The debt of sin was not just paid for, the broken relationship was also repaired.

Those disciples could rejoice because they now knew a very different God than the rest of the world. They knew a God who loved them. They knew a God that came to them. They knew a God that sacrificed for them. And through our knowledge of Jesus and what he has done for us, we also know that personal, loving God; that God who does not just declare "Not guilty," but who also takes us in his arms and embraces us as his own.

To those who know how personal and loving God is, Paul explains how it changes our future as well. Having been reconciled, the end of the world and the judgment that await us on that day does not fill us with fear or uncertainty. We will not stand before an angry, impersonal Judge on that day. We will stand in front of our Savior, whom we know so well, who personally sacrificed to save us, who has made us his own, who gives us assurance that our relationship is good.

Because we have been reconciled with God, Paul says that we can rejoice, now and forever. We can rejoice because our sins have been forgiven. We can rejoice because our relationship with God has been fixed. We can rejoice because, simply put, we personally know God. And that is reconciliation. Amen.