

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the church in Corinth the fifth chapter verses sixteen through twenty-one.

Good morning boys and girls! I pray that you are doing well today. I have two things here. A bag of nuts and a chocolate bar. Which one would you like to have more? The chocolate bar, I thought so. If you got the nuts when you could have gotten the chocolate bar, you would have thought that was a very unfair exchange. In our text for today, we read of an exchange. On one side is us and our sins, on the other is the perfect righteousness of Christ. What does God do with our sins? How does this exchange take place? Ponder these questions, as you hear the rest of the sermon, you may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Though sometimes God doesn't appear to be fair, we tend to pursue righteousness only when it suits us.

How often we've seen things in life that we thought were unfair. A sudden life-threatening illness, the car breaks down on our way to work, the wars and natural disasters that plague the earth, the everyday troubles we face—it's not fair! How could you let this happen, God? Sometimes in the scheme of things, God doesn't appear to be fair.

However, man tends to pursue righteousness only when it suits him. Let's face it—we're far more angry when we are directly affected by the misdeed. We call upon God to make it right. Take away the injustice of it all from us because I have been hurt and affected. Like a kid having to eat their vegetables, we cry out, It's not fair!

In fact, God is perfect in righteousness and justice, so that for us to please him a great exchange had to take place.

See, our call for righteousness is often selective. Many times we would rather not call any attention to injustice, particularly when we're guilty of the same thing. It may not be fair, but at least I didn't get caught. We're happy to let injustice stand when we are the guilty ones, whether it's a small exaggeration of a deduction on our taxes or speeding without getting caught. The truth is that we all breathe a sigh of relief when we get away with injustice.

We are a people fixed on our own pleasures. Justice is only important insofar as it makes our life pleasant. If it interferes with our lifestyle, we'd just as soon have nothing to do with it. We are hypocrites, to say the least. We desire the chocolate bar but too often we are left with nothing.

But God is a God of perfect righteousness and justice. A holy God who can have nothing to do with our filthy sin. His demands are clear. "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). Justice requires us to measure up to the righteousness of God or face the consequences.

When the accounting is complete, we are all left wanting. "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps 14:3). We have nothing good to bring before a righteous God. All our works are as dirty and filthy rags before him. Every attempt at declaring our own innocence falls on empty ears. We dare not cry for true justice, lest God deliver it to us. We are indeed empty bags.

For us to please God, a great exchange had to take place. We need someone who is righteous to plead our case before God, someone who can stand the scrutiny and demands of God's

perfect law without flinching. We need someone who can stand before the Father in our place.

That is precisely what happened when Jesus, the Word made flesh, became our substitute.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is such a man who stands before the Father in our place. He is the second Adam, undoing what the first Adam wrought by his disobedience in the garden. Jesus will take our place before his Father and buy back all of humanity. Through his unlimited atonement, the whole world is reconciled to God (v 15).

Jesus lived our life perfectly. He became fully man so that he would qualify as our substitute. As God in the flesh, He is perfectly Righteousness, He trades it all away to us for our sin. He entered into His creation and became one of us in order to redeem and save us. On the cross, Jesus takes the punishment that we deserve. He suffers, bleeds, and dies for us. He takes our sin and give us His perfect righteousness. To use the illustration from before, Jesus takes our emptiness and gives us His full bar of chocolate.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Through Jesus we have died to sin and been made alive in righteousness. Our old self was crucified with Christ and died there as surely as he died there. From the throes of death rises a new man fully redeemed and cleansed in Baptism to the glory of

Christ our Lord. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (v 17).

A new creation. This means that we do not view things the same way we did before. We view our sins not as wonderful things to do but as hateful and despised things. We view the pain and guilt, the fractured relationships around us and mourn over them, that things have fallen so far. We put others, and their wants and desires first, before our own. We make known the joy that we have, thanking God for every good thing we have been given. We, who were facing the dark specter of death, now have been given the brightness of life forever.

And as a result, we have been given a ministry of reconciliation.

What are the ways you’re making known the joy your heart possesses as you contemplate the new lease on life you’ve experienced through our Lord’s great exchange, his power of reconciliation? We have been given a ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors, making known the wonders of a God who desires mercy and grace toward his creation. God’s Son, Jesus, now lives in us. Everything we do and say should reflect the new life to which we now have claim by faith.

Just as we are no longer to see ourselves in light of our old self, so we are no longer to see others in the same way either. We bring to them the wondrous news that has changed our lives. This gift that God has given to us he has given to the whole world. However, the world is largely unaware of this message. This is why we have been given this ministry.

God has given us joy in our hearts and a purpose for our lives. He has chosen us for a ministry of reconciliation. May we share the great news of the whole world’s redemption in Christ Jesus,

our Lord, telling them that there is a greater exchange than nuts and chocolate, that of our sins and His righteousness through the cross of Calvary.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.