



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 21, 2024

Pastor David Ruddat

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 37

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:14-20](#)

From Jordan's Shore to Mountain's Glory: Committed to a Lofty Charge Be Reconciled to God

1. Reconciliation is _____.
2. A _____ life is new.
3. God _____ a reconciled life.
4. We are _____ of a reconciled life.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

I invite you to pray with me:

Direct us now, gracious Lord, to hear aright your holy Word.
Assist your minister to preach, and let the Holy Spirit teach.
Let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound.
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

As a pastor going through lessons for the Epiphany season, at first glance this seemed to me like this was out of place. This is a really good text for Lent. He died for all. Or, God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us. Those are Lenten things we like to think about and I'm sure in one of the lectionaries, it's falling right there in Lent. I think Ash Wednesday is the Wednesday that it is falling under. Or, it might be a really good mission text because it talks about how we are ambassadors of this message of reconciliation. We are imploring others to **be reconciled to God**. But it doesn't seem to fit in the season of the church year when we are talking about Jesus being revealed to be the Savior of the world; revealed to be God in human flesh.

However, when you look at our Gospel Lesson for today and you see and listen to Jesus' message, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near," this is a message of reconciliation. This is a message for this season. This is a message that God, in human flesh, has come to proclaim and to live and to be in a relationship, a good relationship, with us. So it's a good text for today.

But first of all, we need to understand what reconciliation is. First of all, reconciliation is a relationship term. When we have two individuals who are estranged, maybe a husband and wife, maybe there is a sin that has happened or some elephant in the room, some conversation that needs to be had and it seems like they are going their separate ways or living their separate lives until this conversation happens. When that conversation happens, maybe it's a heartfelt conversation, a meaningful conversation between husband and wife, maybe you have to bring a pastor or a counselor in, after that they then live reconciled. Once the communication happens, now they are both on the same page. That's behind this concept of reconciliation.

Reconciliation has this picture of two mountains. God is on one mountain. You and I are on the other mountain. What is between the mountains? There is a huge valley, a huge barrier between God and us. That barrier is sin. Whether it's original sin or whether it's sin that we commit, it's something of bulk between us and God.

Have you ever heard the phrase "God loves the sinner but hates the sin"? I think people are well meaning when they say that, but it's not entirely Biblical because God hates the sinner. That's why He is on His mountain, and we are on ours. There is a problem in our relationship with God. We've sinned. We have disobeyed Him. The human race has disobeyed Him. They are on one side, they are going one direction. God is going the other direction.

But God decides to cross over that valley. The only way He can do that is through Christ. So there is a cross-shaped bridge in between those two mountains. That is Christ. It's Him living a perfect life for us, dying a death that we deserved. God made Him who had no sin to be sin, to be that whole valley of sin, for us. So now God comes to our side and says we are together again. We are on the same team. We are living in harmony.

Reconciliation is a relational term. It's what Jesus was saying when He said "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Repent—turn from your sin, because God is here. He has crossed over the valley. Here He is, in human flesh, speaking to you the very words, and with those very words, He is enabling you to do what He is asking. So when Paul says, "Be reconciled to God," that has the power of God behind it for you and me to turn from our sins, to acknowledge our sinfulness to God, and also for Him to proclaim to us that He has crossed the valley. He is on your team. He is on your mountain. You are reconciled with God.

That leads us to the second point. A *reconciled life is new*. It's not something we have by nature. It's not something we have because we are breathing. It's something new. By nature we are completely different. We are on that mountain going our own way. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians, **he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves...** Reconciliation is new. It's something we have by nature. It's not something we want by nature. It's something new.

You and I still have this sinful nature inside of us. We still have this selfish nature. It happens in friendships. What happens in a friendship with one friend who only wants a friendship going their direction? "You need to help me and be there for me. You need to support me emotionally," but it's not going the other way? The friendship isn't going to last that long. What happens in a marriage when husband and wife are going their own way, not looking for the best needs of the other? What happens in our relationship with God when we do the same thing? "God, I know what you say in your Word, but I want to... I know what you say about gossip, but they should hear this gossip stuff. I know what you say about marriage, but... I know what you say about stealing, but this..." We have that human nature inside of us that is going our own way, doing what WE want, not what the Lord wants, but what WE want. For that brothers and sisters, we need to repent. God, in His grace and His mercy, makes us new.

God has restored your relationship with Him. He sent His Son to die for your sins. For all those times you were selfish and thinking about yourself and living for yourself, Jesus paid for that with His life on the cross. God looks at you and says, "Son, daughter, beloved by me, a reconciled life is new." Isn't that a neat thought to think about when you think of the sins that you struggle with? The sins that are problematic and you're like "Lord, I really want to get rid of this and I know I should, but I have a record." Brothers and sisters, your reconciled life is new! God's mercies for you are new every morning. God doesn't bring up the past when we mess up. They are new.

What would your life be like, what would tomorrow be like if you thought about your life, your relationship with God in this way—it's new, in Christ and through what He has done?

Thirdly, God *creates* a reconciled life. Not only is a reconciled life relational with us and God, but it also empowers us to live a life that is reconciled. As Paul says in Verse 14 when he says, **"For Christ's love compels us..."** The Greek word has that idea of God's love is surrounding us almost like we are a plastic water bottle and God is holding onto that with both of His hands and He is just loving us and squeezing us and then what happens? Yes, water comes out but in this picture His love comes out to other people. Christ's love compels us he says. God creates this reconciled life through His Word and Sacraments and He is active in that reconciled life. Christ's love compels.

Do you ever have it happen when you are doing the right thing, the best thing for someone else, but you don't have any touchy feelings or warm fuzzies inside when you are doing it but you know you're doing the right thing? I know 20 years ago I started my ministry in Montana. We were right along the interstate. There were lots of people coming through. Lots of people were asking for help. You guys who have been involved in Compassion Ministry know that there are some individuals that genuinely need help. But then there are some other individuals that are gaming the system. This was an individual that was gaming the system. He came and I had a conversation with him. I tried to talk to him about Jesus. Basically what he needed was a hotel room, so I said "I'll pay for your hotel room." Of course he was gushing with all kinds of platitudes, "How God must love me. Da... Da... Da... Da... Da..." Finally I just said "I'm not doing this for you." That's probably a cold thing to say, but at that moment I was realizing Christ's love compels.

That's true for us as individuals as Christians, isn't it? You sit down with your family and you're going to have a family devotion. You don't have any warm, touchy feelings but you know this is the right thing to do. You get your kids up in the morning, and you get them to church. You don't have any warm fuzzies about coming to church but you know it's the right thing to do. When you have to have that conversation with your loved one or a conversation with a friend and you know that you have to talk about hard things with them because you want to talk to them about Jesus and forgiveness and a reconciled life that Jesus has for them, you won't have the warm fuzzies. But because of Christ and His power in you, it compels.

Christ's love compels. It was true for Paul, true for the early Church, true for us today. Christ's love compels. We can't do anything in this life/world that is from a heart of love unless God, who is the source of all love, is working that. What a comfort for us to know that God creates this reconciled life. Through Word and Sacrament, He creates. He moves us. His love surrounds us. He doesn't just leave us by ourselves but gives us His Word and Sacraments and gives us the power to do hard things. Christ's love compels!

Finally, the last point for today is that *we are ambassadors of a reconciled life*. Back again to my time in Terry, Montana, one of my members had a phrase. It was the first time I had heard it, but I'm sure he was not the originator of the phrase. He says, "God has called us not to be lawyers for Him but ambassadors." You understand the phrase, don't you? God isn't calling us to work anybody into heaven but to be ambassadors—to share the good news of Jesus with them; to share the truth of God's Word with them. We are ambassadors, not lawyers. We can't change anyone's heart by our own effort or words or persuasion—only through God's Word. And you and I live as ambassadors.

We are ambassadors of a reconciled life—a life that we are living in because of Christ, a reconciled life that God creates in us through His means, a reconciled life that is new every morning, every week. You and I get to share this wonderful reconciled life.

Repent, yes, for the kingdom of heaven is near. The same message of Jesus is our message. Repent, turn from sin, but here Jesus is, in Word and Sacrament. He is near! He's not far off that you have to reach up for Him. He is here in Word! He is here in the Lord's Supper! He is here in Baptism! From the river to the mountain, Jesus is revealed to be God and Savior. He has come to us with a message worth sharing, a message worth living—be reconciled with God. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.