

“Who is Jesus? Reconciler” Colossians 1:17-23

Introduction

If my kids want something really bad and I don't want to give it to them, they say, “pretty please!?” “When I say “Vielen Dank” to someone, they say “bitte schön.” I thank the guy at the pretzel stand, and they say back to me, “please, pretty!” Please pretty, literally. That's funny to me.

We do something for someone. What do they say in English? Probably one of two things. Either “no problem,” or “you're welcome”. What's the difference? Below the surface, there's a huge difference.

Mark Labberton tells us this:

If we say “no problem,” it's like we're saying, “well, this time it wasn't a problem for me.” It's also kind of a lie, right? I did something for you, and it took me time and energy. But I'm going to pretend like it didn't. “No problem.”

Labberton says that “you're welcome” is different. “You're welcome” says: “come on in! My house is your house! It's my joy to do this for you, and I hope you'll ask next time you have a need, too!”

God is not a “no problem” God. God is a “you're welcome” God.

In both the morning and evening services, we are starting the year by looking closely at the identity of Jesus in Colossians. Who is Jesus? Last week, the answer was “Image.” Today we get the second aspect of Jesus' identity. Who is Jesus? Reconciler.

Before we can celebrate Jesus as Reconciler, we need to ask ourselves: what is our problem, exactly? Then we'll ask, “Who is Jesus, and how is his identity good news?” Finally, we'll ask, “so what? How does this change my life?”

What's our problem?

A meme started in the film *Ocean's Eleven*, when one of the casino robbers messed up their one job. Now people say “you had one job!” all the time. Our family says that to each other when we goof something up, just for fun.

Adam and Eve had lots of work to do in the Garden, but they really just had one Job: enjoy and glorify God.

An evil spirit in rebellion against God showed up as a snake, and Adam let that spirit say all kinds of nasty things about God. Adam and Eve believed these things, and joined the rebellion.

Why is our relationship with God so messed up?

Paul says here (23) that we were enemies with God in our minds; before we ever did a thing that was evil, or failed to do a thing that was good, our minds were already set against our Creator.

As Tim Keller says, the minute you ask yourself, “hmm, should I sin, or not?”, you’ve already sinned. If you’re trying to decide whether to rebel against your Creator, your heart is already in rebellion!

When Adam and Eve sat and listened to this snake tell them a false story about God and what God wants, and what God loves, they should have done their one job and booted that rebel snake out of the Garden. Instead, they started believing those lies, until ultimately they joined Team Lie and rebelled against their Maker.

Now, in response, for God to say “no problem” here would be a lie.

It’s a really big problem.

And the result, as we read in Genesis 3, was a broken relationship with God. As Paul says in verse 21 here: we were alienated from God. In Adam, we used to walk around naked and unashamed in the Garden and *talked with our Creator*. All of a sudden, we’re hiding in the bushes and covering ourselves up with leaves.

And because we were made in God’s image, made to rule over the Earth in love as God’s representative, and we rebelled instead, the results of our rebellion impact more than just our relationship with God. By convincing us to rebel, the kingdom of darkness suddenly was able to mess with our world. Lies, betrayal, war, pain, pollution, famine, disasters, and death: this is what we got when we decided, in Adam, that we wanted to vote on our ruler, and we voted for ourselves in collusion with that snake. Paul says elsewhere that the whole creation now groans. The way we feel about our work so often --- as we read earlier in Ecclesiastes --- is the way that the whole creation feels because of our failure: “Uggh. What’s the point?”

We had one job. It was not complicated. We failed. And we keep failing. And it’s *not* “no problem.”

Who is Jesus?

When we rebelled in Adam and Eve, God sent us out of the Garden. Where we can work, but with much trouble; where we can have children, but with much pain; where we can live for a while, but where we will die.

Is that the end of the story? Is it all bad news? Where do we get the first bit of good news?

Some people say that Genesis 3:15 is the first time we hear the gospel in the Bible. When God promised to send someone to crush the head of that lying serpent and bring the world back into order, through one of Adam and Eve's children. This is definitely the gospel. And it's stunning and beautiful and unexpected and undeserved.

But I think the first time we hear the gospel in the Bible --- the good news that God will heal our relationship with us, fix everything that we've ruined, and bring about the flourishing of creation --- the first time we hear this, is when we read (Gen 3:9) that God called went looking for Adam and Eve, who were hiding in the Garden, and said "where are you?!"

See, God already knew what happened. He knew where they were hiding. But his desire to reconcile bursts onto the pages of Scripture in the ninth verse of the third chapter, just 3 verses after their complete rebellion.

Keller says that we are so sinful that Jesus had to die for us. But we were so loved that Jesus was glad to die for us.

We could say that our rebellion is so serious that Jesus had to die for us. But God so desired us that he said "Where are you?" and then, by pursuing us in love, by saying not "no problem" but "You're welcome!", Christ shows that he was glad to die for us.

(22) God has reconciled us in Christ's death. And now there is no accusation against us. No more hiding out of fear and guilt. No more pathetic attempts to cover over our failures and shame.

Think about this! We utterly failed, and still fail, to represent God. Instead we rebel!

Jesus represents God by doing it all right. By perfectly loving his Father, and by perfectly loving his neighbor. By experiencing every bit of temptation that we experience, and more, but resisting it! By staying loyal all the way till the end. We voted for ourselves in collusion with the Devil. Jesus went out into the desert and was tempted ---- and stood against the gates of hell and didn't back down for one second. This perfect representation of God, doing all we should have done as God's image-bearers, then represents us. He goes to the cross and suffers as a rebel. In his physical body like ours (22) he lived our life and died our death. And then he

brings us to God and says, “here’s your daughter, your son, whom you love. I have brought them home!”

What wondrous love!

But that’s not all. As Reconciler, Jesus does more:

In our globalised economy with our communication technology, something significant that happens in one place, at one time, can impact everyone on Earth. A president says something encouraging, and the stock markets of the world soar. A CEO announces a disappointing lack of profits for the fourth quarter, and stocks drop sharply. And that’s just the stock market.

There is no place in all of creation, where the astonishing news of peace through the cross has not resounded. When Jesus breathed his last breath, the temple curtain was torn in two. The earth quaked. Many of the dead rose to life. The the forces of darkness were stunned. he angels in heaven erupted into shouts of joy and laughter. The news of this peace-making event sent shock waves through the created order. And it still does every time it is proclaimed and believed!

What now?

I want you to hear three things from Jesus today.

1. “Where are you?” That is what God is asking you today.

“Where are you? I have not just pretended like you didn’t rebel. I have not just ignored the way you sit there and think: ‘should I sin, or should I not sin?’ I have come looking for you. And then I have done something about it all: about your heart, about your life, about your rebellion. About your shame. Your guilt. Where *are* you? Will you come out of the bushes and stop covering yourself and your rebellion up with pathetic suits made of fig leaves, and shake my hand, kiss my cheek, wear my ring, put on my robe, come into my house, and serve me and enjoy me?”

2. As Paul writes in verse 23, Jesus is saying: “Stay with me.” We must continue in our trust. Don’t just hear this good news, and say, Okay, nice. Root yourself in it. Build your life on it. On me. In me. Some people get bored with this Jesus who has won a peace with God. Others become, as Paul describes himself, the bonds slave of Jesus (23). And as they do, they never, ever lose hope, no matter how messed up they realize their hearts can be. No matter how broken they find the world to be. One of my mentors, every time he messages me, or emails me, before he signs his name----instead of writing “later” or even “sincerely,” he writes STAND FAST! That’s what Jesus is saying to you today:

“Do you want a life rooted on a foundation of unfailing hope---despite your failures and pain? Stand fast in my reconciling love!”

3. The last thing Jesus is saying to you today is this: “You’re Welcome!” And as he says this, he doesn’t just mean “No problem.” But he also doesn’t just mean “I was glad to die for you.” He means “You’re welcome into the new world, the renewed creation, that you have longed for. I made the whole creation. And now I am (20) reconciling the whole creation to my Father and yours. This is my Father’s world, and I’m here to win it back. I’ve started that in my body, in my life and in my death, and in my resurrection. And one day I will make all things new. You’re welcome. Welcome to live and move and find your place in my Father’s world. You’re welcome to reflect my image as we represent my Father here. You’re welcome to imitate me as I do all things well and as I make all things new. You’re welcome to enjoy the world the way that Adam and Eve once did; to love it and care for it the way you were meant to. I’m not ashamed to call you my sister and brother. You’re welcome.

There you have it. Jesus’ three questions to you:

“Where are you?”

“Stand Fast!”

“You’re Welcome.”