



Pentecost 14

September 10, 2017 – 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: We Are Christ's Ambassadors!

Sermon Text: Colossians 4:2-6 (NIV)

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

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The God of the Bible—the one, true, Triune God of our salvation whom we Christians worship and serve—is both *just* and *holy*. That differentiates Him from every man-made god. The gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans—and today, the gods of the Hindus and some tribal religions—aren’t much different from people. They share human desires, human virtues and most human vices. That shouldn’t surprise us, since they are gods invented by human beings. But the true God, the God of the Bible, isn’t a man-made invention. His attributes of *justice* and *holiness* magnify God’s complete “otherness” from all created things. These attributes of God—like His grace, love and mercy—are attributes that tell us both about God’s essence—*who He is*—and about His activity—*what He does*.

God is 100% *just* inside of Himself. *Justice* is His very essence. To *be just* is to have a perfect standard of right and wrong. To *act justly* is to judge perfectly according to that standard, to condemn and punish all sin and imperfection, and to praise and reward all perfection. In [Psalm 19:9](#), the psalmist declares as much when he writes: “[The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.](#)” This standard of perfection, we might say, is part of God’s DNA. The apostles Peter and Paul tell us that God exercises His justice without playing favorites. Paul says in [Romans 2:11](#) that “[God does not show favoritism,](#)” and we read in [1 Peter 1:17](#) that we “[call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially.](#)” God is perfectly *just!*

God is also 100% *holy*. The word *holy* means “separate from sin.” The Bible makes it clear that the opposite of *holiness* is any kind of moral uncleanness or imperfection. God is the exact opposite of all that is evil or wrong, unclean and imperfect. He cannot tolerate evil or accept it, either. To do so would be unholy and unjust. God revealed His *holiness* and His *justice* in the Garden of Eden when He warned Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit and then attached the penalty they should expect if they did. So perfect is His *holiness* that death—that is, eternal separation from Him—is the consequence of imperfection, uncleanness and sin. Such a verdict is also *just*, for when Adam and Eve sinned, they rebelled against the Creator, forfeiting the very purpose for which they were created; namely, to exalt the glory of God by perfectly obeying Him. The *just* judgment of the *holy* God—the judgment of death—is a separation from God and from all His goodness and grace. That rift is the very essence of hell—it is eternal torment!

God’s attributes of *justice* and *holiness* present us with a serious conundrum. Someone or something cannot be a little *holy* or a lot *holy*. *Holy* is *holy*, period. Any flaw, fault or error renders that person or thing unholy. But if God is *just* and *holy*, and if God cannot therefore accept anything less than *justice* and *holiness*, who can stand before Him? It will not do for God simply to forgive, for that would be unjust. And it would render God unholy. God cannot be unholy or unjust, or He would no longer be the Triune God of our salvation. What a terrifying thought!

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The problem goes still deeper. If God doesn't forgive, then how can He be loving, gracious and merciful? The attributes of God appear to lock Him in an impossible conflict within Himself! Even most man-made religions recognize this dilemma and struggle to resolve it. Some try to resolve the apparent tension between God's love and His justice by minimizing His justice and exaggerating His goodness. Their reasoning goes like this: "Just do the best you can; follow the rules and observe the rituals and God will be satisfied and will let it go at that." But in that case, God is not *just*; He cannot be *just* and *holy* and simply give evil a free pass, much less accept it as satisfactory behavior worthy of His standard of perfection.

God resolves the impossible in Christ! To satisfy His love, grace and mercy, and His *justice* and *holiness*—God punishes and erases all injustice and unholiness through the substitutionary obedience and suffering of His Son. With that in mind, Paul says: **"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them."**

What absolutely astounding good news that is for you, for me and for all mankind! What a glorious truth worth rejoicing over every day of our life, and, beyond our earthly life, throughout eternity in heaven! Since Jesus willed this task upon Himself, no injustice is done to Him when He suffers in our place; that's what He chose to do, what He longed for and wanted to do! This truth is the very heart and core of the gospel! It is the source of all our joy and delight! And the beauty of it is, that God's essential attributes of *righteousness* and *holiness* are credited to us because our Savior has taken away all our unrighteousness and forgiven all our unholiness! It's essential that we grasp this fact: since *holiness* and *righteousness* are absolutes, God cannot accept us unless we're *holy* and *righteous*. And that's what we became the moment the Holy Spirit created saving faith in Christ within us! Christ's *righteousness*—His *holiness*—has been credited to us by faith, for, as Paul says in our text, **"God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God."** What a gift!

So how do we respond? To begin with, we're exceedingly grateful for God's grace. And grateful hearts produce grateful fruit. We put our faith into action—powered by the Holy Spirit—as we serve as His **"ambassadors"** to a dying planet. Since God lives in us, we've had a change of attitude, Paul says, writing, **"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!"**

As those who've been made new in Christ, we're to tell others that they, too, have a Savior from sin and death in Jesus. God has called us to proclaim to all **"that God was**

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reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

Ambassadors are sent to foreign lands to represent the best interests of the nation at whose behest they serve. They're tasked with imparting to foreign diplomats and heads of state the policies and opinions of their own nation. They'll be recalled if they speak their own mind or offer their own policy suggestions that aren't in keeping with those of the nation from which they hail. Ambassadors don't create policy—the proclaim it. So, as **"Christ's ambassadors,"** you and I are tasked with **"speaking the truth in love"** (Eph. 4:15) to those who still belong to Satan. We're to **"implore them on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God,"** and to announce the most glorious good news of all, namely, that **"God made [Jesus], who had no sin, to be sin offering for [them], so that in [Jesus they] might become the righteousness of God"!**

Serve faithfully, friends, as representatives of **"the King of kings and the Lord of lords"** (1 Tim. 6:15)! As the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Colossi: **"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone"** (4:5-6). God only knows what will transpire because of our witnessing endeavors. Sharing Jesus' love with others can be exhilarating and edifying, too—especially if He sees fit to let us see the spiritual transformation that takes place in the hearts and lives of those we evangelize. God is both *holy* and *just*. He must punish sin for those attributes to exist within Him. But He is, at the same time, gracious, loving and merciful in Christ Jesus.

Rejoice, fellow **"ambassadors,"** that **"God made [Jesus], who had no sin, to be a sin offering for us"**—and **"not only for [us], but also for the sins of the whole world"** (1 John 2:2)—**"so that in Jesus we"**—*and those we witness to*—**"might become"** righteous in God's sight! All God asks of us is that we plant and water the seeds of the gospel whenever and wherever we have the opportunity, praying and trusting that as we do, **"God"** Himself will be the One **"making it grow"** (1 Cor. 3:6). What an encouraging and comforting promise we can depend on 100% of the time! Marvel at the amazing God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—we worship and serve! Amen.

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