

17 S. after Pentecost 9/19/21
James 3:13-4:10 20B

A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SOWN IN PEACE BY THOSE WHO MAKE PEACE.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God,” Jesus said (Mt 5:9). In our epistle, James echoes Jesus’ words. Jesus brought peace between God and us, so living in Christ and being Christ to our neighbor, we strive to live in peace with our neighbor and bring peace to God’s creation. “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace,” James writes (3:18).

I. Daily, we are reminded that we live in conflict. The Taliban are back on control of Afghanistan, and immediately instituted Sharia law. And that has meant women protesting for their rights and equality have been beaten. Women are now required to wear burqas in public, so burqa prices have doubled. Girls as young as 15 are forced into marriages. This past week, we heard, through tears and trembled words, American gymnasts recounting openly, publicly before a Senate Committee the abuse they suffered at the hands of a medical doctor. CBSN Chicago reported that last weekend, in just one weekend, at least 62 people were shot in Chicago, 6 fatally. Our nation is fixated on a missing 22-year-old Florida woman.

But, we don’t need to spend all of our time lamenting this evil world in which we live. If we want to see conflict, all we need to do is look to our lives and hearts. Husbands and wives hate each other; sibling doesn’t talk to sibling; co-workers stab one another in the back; Christian congregations are torn apart and the ministry of the Lord’s Church is not done because of conflict.

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice...What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you” (vv. 16, 4:1)?

A guy goes to visit with his pastor because he's having struggles in his marriage. The pastor asked him what was going on and man said, “Every time my wife and I have a disagreement she gets HIS - torical on me.” His pastor replied, greatly puzzled and confused, “Historical? Don't you mean she gets HYS-terical.” “No,” the fellow said, “she gets HIS-torical. She goes back and brings up everything that I have ever done wrong, every mistake I have ever made.”

That's the way of our flesh – we keep a record of wrongs; we want revenge; we just can't wait until our neighbor gets theirs. God forgives and remembers our sin no more, but we say, “I'll forgive, but I'll never forget.” God says this He wishes only good for us, but we want harm, ruin, destruction on those who have wronged us, those who disagree with us, those who just plain annoy us.

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice...What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you” (vv. 16, 4:1)? Sin leads to conflict and conflict makes us enemies of God and enemies of each other.

II. This is not what God wants for us. When our sin enslaved us in conflict with God and with one another, God removed that sin that separated us from Him and one another in the blood of His only-begotten Son Jesus.

Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Christ took away your sin, my sin, the sin of all the world. All of our

sins were put upon the Lamb Jesus and He carried those sins to the cross. For those sins, He was nailed to that wooden rod of torture and gave up His innocent life into death. Because Jesus has taken away all of our sin, we no sin separates us from God anymore and we are reconciled to God. St. Paul says it this way, “For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross” (Co 1:20).

You know I love to ask you the question: What does God do with sin? Think back to our confession and absolution. You confess your sin and what does God say to you? Through the voice of your pastor, He says, “I forgive you all you sin!” God forgives your sin and remembers it no more. He forgives sin and the conflict that sin caused is gone!

III. By virtue of our baptism into Christ, we live in Christ and we are Christ to the world. As Christ was a Peacemaker, we are peacemakers, forgiving sin as God forgives, seeking to be reconciled to all, living at peace with all people. “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (v. 18).

In the 5th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray: “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In our *Small Catechism*, we learn the meaning of those words:

“We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayers because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”¹

The CROSS is such a beautiful symbol of the Christian faith and life. The cross not only reminds us the sacrifice our dear Savior made to

reconcile us to God, but the 2 parts of the cross also teach us what it means to live a Christian life. The vertical beam reminds us that God loves us and forgives us. The horizontal reminds us that we are to reach out in love and forgive our neighbor, just as God has done to us in Christ. The blood of Jesus has taken away the sins that separated us from God and the from one another. The blood of Jesus has reconciled us to God and to each other.

Forgiving one another as God has forgiven us reconciles us to all and puts an end to conflict. The early church had an interesting custom to show that we live at peace with all. Before communing together at the Lord's table, any Christian could go to any other Christian and hug, bodily embrace one another. The hug, the physical act of embracing one another, was a physical symbol of the reconciliation they had in Christ. The hug was the sign that there was no conflict between them.

The really interesting part of that practice of the Lord's Church was that if conflict remained between any two Christians -- any two people -- the service was stopped and did not continue, no one communed, until the parties were reconciled.

The Christian life is all about being daily renewed in Christ so that we may love and forgive, treat people, just as God treats us in Christ. Daily, we renew ourselves to live like Christ. Daily, we return to the waters of our Baptism to drown our sinful flesh so that it dies to unholy desires and we rise to new life in Christ to live before God in righteousness, purity, and innocence. In His Word, God gives us strength to live the renewed life we have in Christ. He feeds us with His grace in Body and His Blood so that we are able to live like Christ. In Christ, living and moving and have our daily being in Christ, we can reach out in love to my neighbor, just as Christ

has reached out in love to us.

Dear Saints of God, our hearts yearn for that day when we will live in heaven, at perfect peace with all the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. But, until that blessed day the angels come to carry your soul to Abraham's bosom, live in the peace of Christ to be a peacemaker, to live at peace with all.

¹*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 21.