

Sermon March 24th, 2019

God is patient, Kind, and Merciful

Growing up in a single parent home we didn't have a lot of money. So, whenever the next popular music group came to Edmonton on tour like the Back-Street Boys or N-sync or Our Lady Peace or Nirvana or Tupac Shakur, my friends would line up to get tickets to their concerts, while I made up excuse after excuse on why I couldn't join them.

Now the point of this story is not to get you thinking poor pastor. I did get a chance to attend two concerts in my adolescent years. The first was Rod Stewart. I went with my Mom and her friend. Yeah. I had no life. Great concert. Though it was weird being the only person under forty there.

The other concert I attended was Chicago. Again, great concert. Again, I was the youngest by at least twenty-years. Yet, it was at this concert where I had one of my first profound theological/philosophical thoughts. I was listening along when the lyrics "Hold me now. It's hard for me to say I'm sorry" caught my attention. My mind started racing. This song resonated with me. In fact, this song resonates with all humanity. It is really hard to say I'm sorry when we say or do something or even not say or do something that hurts the people we encounter.

For some reason my parent's relationship struggles popped into my head. I thought about how neither of my parents wanted to take any accountability for the breakdown of their marriage. When ever I talked about it with them, trying to figure out what went wrong, they would just blame each other.

This thought then led me into a theological thought about the garden scene in Genesis and how Adam quickly deflects blame to Eve who then deflects blame to the serpent.

I then turned my thoughts on myself. Reflecting on all my relationships and how hard I found it to say sorry when a friend or family member confronted me after I said or did something to hurt them.

Finally, before the next song started playing I thought about how hard it must be for God to wait for us to get around to saying we are sorry for all the messed-up things we say and do, or don't say and do, that seem to pull us in a different direction from the way God is trying to guide us towards.

Like I said before, my mind was racing all over the place while I was listening to this song. This song connected me to one of the most foundational attributes of building a healthy and long-lasting relationship. Repentance and forgiveness. I wouldn't be surprised if we all resonate with these words "Hold me now. It's hard for me to say I'm sorry."

For example, you had a fight recently with your spouse over something you said. And the fight would have been over in a second if you would have just apologized. Instead, that awkwardness you feel when you wish you could take something back took over and you turned the problem into a joke minimizing your partner's feelings. Or your stubborn pride took over and you either told your partner they are being too sensitive or you turned the tables on them saying they are at fault. Deflecting the blame.

Or you get in a heated argument with your adult child over how they are raising their children. Your grandchildren. You say some things you regret and instead of saying sorry you rationalize your words. You think they are being unreasonable and should just accept your advice.

Or a friend on Facebook says something you totally disagree with and you decide to write a response that basically patronizes and belittles them. They delete you from their friend list, and instead of trying to reach out by apologizing and explaining your feelings with love you convince yourself you are better off without them. Why do you need friends who disagree with you anyways?

How often do we find ourselves stuck in a fight with someone we love that probably didn't need to happen in the first place if we were more open to admitting our fault and saying these three simple words "I am sorry."

In our gospel Jesus invites us to say sorry for the hurtful parts of ourselves. Some choose to accept Jesus' invitation, and others struggle to. Jesus gets angry and reminds us that we face consequences when we are unable to repent.

Unfortunately, we see these consequences touching our lives more often than we would like. Whether it is dealing with a broken severed relationship. Or feelings of shame that we carry with us for a long time. Or even rejection from a community. We know that our struggles with being able to say sorry are painful. We don't really need Jesus to tell us this.

However, Jesus isn't preaching about repentance to pour on the shame, or to get us to fear God. Though I'm sure people may hear his message in this way.

Instead, Jesus is preaching about repentance to liberate us. To free us from living in a constant state of brokenness in our relationships. To lift us from the shame. To reconnect us to the community. This is why Jesus tells us God is willing to wait another year after waiting three years as we struggle to bear figs. God would rather hear us say I'm sorry. Then watch us suffer the consequences of what happens to us when we are unable to repent. Even if this means God has to wait until we figure it out. God is patient. God is kind. God is merciful.

God waits for us, because God longs for us to turn our hearts towards God. God longs for us to experience loving and reconciling relationships with one another. And repentance isn't just about saying I'm sorry. It is about a transformation of our heart that leads us into living differently.

This is what Lent is all about. It is a journey that is supposed to turn our hearts from all the brokenness and distractions we face that make it hard for us to have a relationship with our Creator, with each other. To repent. To be liberated to feel loved. To be liberated to act from a place of love.

Every Sunday we have an opportunity to come to church and repent for the hurtful parts of ourselves. We lift up our brokenness to God, to each other, with the hopes that God will cleanse our hearts and help us be the people God created and calls us to be. To learn and grow from our brokenness that only comes from repentance. To hope that those we wronged will be granted the heart to forgive us.

We do this in our corporate confession and forgiveness. We do this when we sing hymns. We do this when we reflect on the gospel. We do this when we recite the Lord's Prayer. We do this when we come to the table and receive the body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Every day we have opportunities to repent for the hurtful parts of ourselves. Whether it is falling to our knees at our bedside or standing in the middle of a walking path surrounded by nature, or in the car while listening to Chicago, or in front of the person we wronged. Every day we have

opportunities to sing those words, “hold me now. I’m trying so hard to say I’m sorry.”

It is hard to say sorry, but when we are able to open our hearts to admit to our frailty, the hurtful parts of ourselves. Then our hearts turn towards God, the one who we need to depend on. The one who cleanses our hearts lifting us up to do things differently in the future. Freeing us to live with grace not shame. To live with love not hate. To be the people God created and called us to be.

God is indeed patient, kind, and merciful.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for your patience, your kindness, and your mercy. May we trust in this gracious love you offer us, coming to you with repentant hearts. May our hearts be cleansed freeing us to be the people you created and called us to be. **Amen.**