

Sermon Notes for 12/25/16 (Christmas Day – on a Sunday)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: John 1:17-18

Theme: CLOSE TO THE FATHER’S HEART

The Point: Jesus, by focusing our attention on what God is doing for us, calls us to relate to our God as children relate to a dear father.

Introduction: “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” Today’s epistle lesson puts it this way: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.” The Son who is close to the Father’s heart, who bears the exact imprint of God’s very being – this is the One who is born to lie in a manger on Christmas morn. How do we know this One who is close to the Father’s heart? And why is that important on this Christmas Day?

God spoke in ancient times through the prophets. Law came through Moses. Thunder and lightning and a voice that struck fear into the hearts of the Israelites at Mount Sinai – that was the accompaniment of the law received there by Moses. Moses was the intermediary chosen by God to speak the word of law to His people. Now make no mistake – law is a good thing. I would not want to live in a society where the rule of law had failed. Would you? Think Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Burundi. Want to move there? Of course not (unless, that is, you might have received a calling to bring them the Good News of Jesus)! Israel had a great blessing in the law. This law received by Moses is the law given by Yahweh Himself. It is beneficial for the people. As people accept its truth and seek to live by it, there will be social order and tranquility. The law stands as the witness to a faithful and trustworthy Father.

The story is told about a little boy who had been invited to a friend’s birthday party. He was so excited and started counting the days until the party. But the morning of the party he was devastated when he found that a blizzard had struck their little town. The snow was falling in wet, heavy flakes, and the wind was howling. “I don’t think you should go to the party,” his father said. The little boy was so disappointed. He began to beg his father to allow him to go. Finally, much to his surprise, his dad said, “All right, you can go to the party.” The little boy bundled up in his hat and coat and mittens and started down the street to his friend’s house. When he got to the door, he turned around and saw his father turning to walk back home. It was then he realized that his father had been walking behind him all the way to make sure he was safe. I believe that little story is a microcosm of the sort of thing that God did with Israel all through their history. So often the people wanted their own way, only to discover that even through their rebellious choices, He would show up on time and work His wonders. So the law is good, coming as it does from a good Father.

But the law has a fatal flaw. The law can never move a person a step closer to the Lord and His will. The law cannot repair the breach that has occurred because of our sin. The law cannot quiet the trembling heart that fears because of its sin and failures. It cannot assure us of the Father’s love – or even whether He cares for us at all. The law offers threats and punishments and curses for disobedience, and those it cannot undo. If the law is to be true, it cannot threaten and just let people off.

You parents realize what happens when your kids break the rules, knowing that you have threatened punishment. If you punish them, they will be angry with you. If you don’t follow through, they will no longer believe you or trust your word, and that is a deeper problem. Not an easy place to be, is it? But our

Lord lives with the same reality. No wonder many people are angry with God. He doesn't (He can't!) just excuse sin or ignore it, winking His eye at his children's faults. No, God is a just God, and His justice will prevail over our ignorance and disobedience of His will.

God's demands and requirements stand firm. He does not change them willy-nilly. But even God's law can find new expression in new situations. Take the Sabbath requirement, for instance. Old Testament Israel was required to worship on the seventh day. But Jesus freed His disciples from living under the regulations that made Sabbath a burden instead of a delight. Old Testament believers were required to bring animals to the temple as living sacrifices. But from the time of Christ's crucifixion at Calvary, Jesus' sacrifice made all those animal sacrifices irrelevant and unnecessary. Law can change.

But God's grace and truth as revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ do not change one iota. From the very beginning of mankind's fall into sin, God has demonstrated His heart of fatherly care and compassion. He invited Adam and Eve, through repentance and trust in His promises, to return to His fatherly heart. He continues to invite people from every generation since to trust that He desires to rescue them from their despair and their emptiness and their hopelessness. What happens at Christmas is that this fatherly heart takes human shape.

God's challenge when it comes to His heart of love and mercy is this: Talking about it is not enough. As John testifies, "No one has ever seen God." And the direct gifts that God gives to people can often be taken wrong by the recipients. Some might think that God is just trying to bribe them into being His friends. Others imagine that God's good gifts hardly outweigh the troubles and problems they suffer. Others have the idea that what they receive is just what they are owed for one reason or another because they have been such exemplary children.

So God determined from all eternity to do more than just talk – and more than just give His gifts (though He certainly has continued to do both of these, seeking to get His love across to us). He determined that His heart would take human form. He decided to live among us. He determined that His Godhead would not keep Him from personally relating to His fallen creatures. He decided to take on flesh. He came to earth to share our human experience from the ground up. Jesus comes as the enfleshing of the Father. Indeed, He even says, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." When we relate to Jesus, we are in fellowship also with the Father, for they operate as a unit as they interact with us.

Rev. James Smith (predecessor of Charles Spurgeon at New Park Street Chapel in London) wrote these penetrating words about our Savior: "Jesus is truly, properly, and naturally, God. He is the object of worship, trust, and love. We cannot think too highly of him. We cannot speak too highly of him. As God, he is the rock on which we build; the savior in whom we trust; the sovereign whom we obey; and the source of all good, from which we expect our supplies. Beware of low thoughts of Christ. Honor him, even as you honor the Father. Walk before him, and be sincere. Walk with him, and be confident and happy. Walk after him, and be consistent. Jesus created all things. Jesus upholds all things. Jesus directs all things. Jesus will be honored by all things. Jesus should be especially honored by his disciples."

One of Jesus' primary objectives is to reveal the Father to us. John puts it this way: "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Jesus came to make the Father known. He is a living billboard, a walking commercial, a breathing trailer for the Father. You know what a trailer is, right? Trailers give you in a short burst a little insight into what you will experience as you watch the movie. Watching Jesus in action during His ministry gives people a little insight into the vast, unseen riches of the heart of the Father.

A king was in his throne room, holding a council with his advisers, noblemen, and high ministers of state.

Suddenly there was a bang and a clatter at the door of the throne room. All eyes turned as the door burst open and a young boy ran into the room. One of the king's royal guardsmen tried to stop the boy. "Hold there, lad!" he shouted. "Don't you know you're disturbing the council of the king?" "He's your king," laughed the boy, "but he's my Daddy!" And the boy bounced into the open arms of his father, the king. That is the sort of bravado that Jesus encourages in our lives. We are beloved children of the King, and to Him we can come with all our joys, all our fears, all our desires, all our hurts.

Conclusion: A father and son arrived in a small western town looking for an uncle whom they had never met. Suddenly, the father, pointing across the square to a man who was walking away from them, exclaimed, "There goes my uncle!" His son asked, "How do you know when you have not seen him before?" "Son, I know him because he walks exactly like my father." If we walk in the Spirit, the world should know us by our walk. (*The Gold Mine*, Lee Roberson) Will people know us because our walk reminds them of Jesus? Jesus, by focusing our attention on what God is doing for us, calls us to relate to our God as children relate to a dear father. We can trust Him, for He knows and walks the walk of a son of God, indeed of THE only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He is the One who is closest to the Father's heart, and He invites us to share that same connection to a God whose love lasts into all eternity. Have a blessed and merry Christmas, by faith in the Lord Jesus, and stay close always to the Father's heart as you live by faith in Him! AMEN!