

## **Reconciling All Things**

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on Colossians 1: 11-20

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When I was living down in Atlanta, years ago, in the group of friends I ran around with there was a guy named Clark who was a lawyer, and one day Clark told me about the first case he ever won. It was a lawsuit that a young woman named Vanessa filed against a couple that lived in a suburban Atlanta home. Vanessa, you see, was housesitting for the couple one weekend. But before the weekend was over, Vanessa was discovered in the couple's home bleeding and unconscious. You see, she had descended a staircase down into the basement when she suddenly found herself under attack by two adult Bengal tigers, but before she was mauled to death by their tigers' claws and teeth, she somehow managed to escape the basement and use the kitchen phone and call 911, just before she collapsed in a pool of blood. Now, Vanessa obviously survived or she could not have filed the lawsuit, but not before she spent two weeks in the ICU clinging to life. Now, I know the question on everyone's mind is, did the couple warn Vanessa about the two vicious tigers? Well, you tell me. All they had said to her was "Now, Vanessa, if you go down to the basement, watch out for the cats. If you go down to the basement, watch out for the cats."

Now, I want us all to take a moment this morning and imagine if you would that this had happened to you. Maybe if that had happened to you, you wouldn't be angry. Maybe you are such a wonderful Christian, and your heart is so filled with God's love that if you were Vanessa you would instantly forgive the wrong done to you. I doubt any of us are quite like that, but if you are, I say that's great. What about the rest of us. If you were Vanessa, who would you be angry with. Well, although you were attacked by the tigers, I don't think you

would be angry with the tigers. Now, that's not to say that you might not be traumatized for the rest of your life at the sight of tigers or that you would ever again want to think about tigers, but if this had happened to you, you would not blame the tigers. You would blame the couple. The tigers, after all were just doing what tigers do. But we don't hold tigers responsible for their actions.

Now, that's not to say that you can't ever scold animals or shame them or even become angry with them. Of course you can. The other day I was eating a delicious slice of cheesecake that was sitting on a t.v. tray that you know, comes up about three or four feet off the ground. I was half way through eating the cheesecake, when I decided that cheesecake would be really delicious with some whipped cream. So, I thought I would take all of five seconds to go into the kitchen and get the whipped cream out of the fridge. But at some time within those five seconds guess who managed to get his face in the cheesecake, the fastest dog in the west. Now, I was angry, but I tell this as a funny story, because we don't hold animals responsible for their actions, and that's what makes it a cute story. When we get angry at animals, we are really angry at ourselves because we failed to train them properly or we were careless with something like a slice of cheesecake. But if a person had done that, the story would not be funny, because we hold people responsible.

Well, if you agree with me that you would not hold an animal responsible for its actions, then how much less would you hold trees and rocks and rivers responsible for their actions. If I am your neighbor and I cut down a tree in my yard, but the tree lands in your yard, you wouldn't blame the tree, you would blame me, the owner of the tree, for not being more careful with my chainsaw. Not only are trees not responsible for their actions, you wouldn't

even say that trees have actions. People, on the other hand do and that's who you would hold responsible.

Or so we would think. Or so we would think, but then we get to our reading from the New Testament today. In our reading from Colossians today, we are told by the author, the author who may have been Paul or who may not have been Paul that in Christ God is reconciling all things to himself. And as you hear these words fall on your ears, you may say that is great. You may say "I can't think of anything better than knowing that someday all people will be reconciled to God" and the message by the way is not that God will be reconciled to us. In spite of the way many people read this, the gospel never says that God rejected us, it says that we rejected God, and through the cross of Jesus Christ, God is bringing us back. But notice, we aren't told in this passage that in the cross of Christ, God is just reconciling all people, it says that God is reconciling all things to himself. And that phrase "all things" includes not just people, but animals, trees, rocks and oceans. And you may say how can that be? It is great that I am being reconciled to God, but how can trees, and oceans and rocks be reconciled to God. Thinking that all things even have the need to be reconciled to God is sort of like thinking that we can blame a tree or get angry with a tree. I remember when I watched the Wizard of Oz as a kid, if you remember there is that one scene where the trees are throwing apples at Dorothy and her companions like the scarecrow and the tinman. Maybe you could get angry with those trees, but to say you could be angry with an ordinary tree or that ordinary trees or rocks or streams need to be reconciled, well, if you'll pardon me, it sounds a little crazy.

But now, I want you to think about this. I wonder if you can remember the first time you fell in love. Well, if you can remember the time when you first fell in love, didn't you have a

sense, didn't you have some kind of sense that the whole world around you was somehow different? Didn't you have a sense that when the birds sang a song, they sang a song just for you and your beloved. Didn't you have a sense that when the stars shone in the heavens and the moon glowed, it was just for the two of you? And suddenly all the poetry that you were ever forced to read in high school about love, and all those silly songs on the radio about love, suddenly they all made sense. Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near? What a silly thing to say, but it all makes sense when you fall in love.

Now, if that doesn't sound completely crazy, then maybe you can begin understand this idea that God is reconciling all things to himself. For you see what we are taught in our faith is not just that with Adam and Eve human beings fell into original Sin, what we are taught in fact, is that all of nature fell right along with it. Everything is disordered. And every day as you wander to and fro around this world of ours you can tell that everything is disordered when you hear not just about the bad and evil choices that humans make, but the bad things around us that have nothing to do with human choices. You can tell that everything is disordered not only when you hear about nations bearing their fangs at each other and preparing for war, but you can tell everything is disordered even hear it when we hear about droughts and floods. You can tell everything is disordered not only when you hear about the latest mass shooting on the news, but you can tell everything is disordered even when you hear about hurricanes and tornadoes. And you can tell everything is disordered not only when you hear about it not only when we hear about child abuse and spousal abuse and drug abuse, but even when we hear about earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes. And when you hear about both of these kinds of things, when you hear enough about them, it suddenly occurs to you that it is wonderful if God

can change the hearts of people, it is wonderful if God can change the wrath in people's hearts, but if God can do nothing about the wrath of nature right along with it, then God isn't much of a God.

When Jesus was in the boat with his disciples one time, you may remember that there was a terrible storm that came up on the sea of Galilee that just seemed to pop up out of nowhere and catch all the disciples by surprise. And you know how the story goes that the winds blew and the waves got rough, and this little vessel the disciples were in rocked violently back and forth and looked like it was going to throw the disciples into the sea. Well, naturally they were all terrified, and as you know they woke Jesus up and he told the storm to settle down. Peace, be still, he commanded, and just like that, everything was calm again. The wind stopped, the rain stopped, the sea became smooth as glass. Unless you are new to the bible and the church you know all this, I'm sure. If you've heard the story once, you've heard it a hundred times. But do you recall what we are told the disciples said to themselves at the end of the story. They said who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him. Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him.

Now you might tell me that's a crazy question. What would it even mean for wind and waves to obey someone's command? Do the wind and the waves have ears that they can hear or minds that they can understand speech. What a crazy thing to say. The disciples knew that the wind and the waves wouldn't obey just anyone and in their minds it took someone with real authority, someone with the authority of God to command the wind and the waves and have them obey. But you may tell me the problem is not that the wind and the waves were disobedient, it is that it makes no sense to say they could be obedient or disobedient. For me to

be disobedient means I have to choose to ignore you. I have to understand that you have told me to do something and I choose to pay no attention to what you've said. Like when you have a two-year old child and you take it to a playground and you say don't throw rocks on the playground, and of course as soon as you say that, what do they do? They throw rocks on the playground. They're being disobedient because you know they hear you and you know they understand you, and yet they choose to ignore you. And yet the wind and the waves, the trees, the rocks, how can they obey? How can they disobey?

You know what, I don't know. I do not know. But here's what I do know. What I do know is that a God who can command the wind and the waves is a God who can also say to a cancerous tumor, retreat, be gone. A God who can command the wind and the waves is a God who can say to rain clouds go to this parched land where nothing grows. A God who can command the wind and the waves is a God who can say to everything that is broken within this creation, be healed. Be healed.

We are told in Colossians that In Christ God is reconciling all things to himself. Not just you and me and all people, but all things. I don't know how that's possible, but I know that's what all of us are looking for. I know that deep down within all of our souls that's what all of us are looking for.