

February 28, 2024 – 1 Peter 3:8-12 & Matthew 15:10-20

What was the last argument you were involved in? Maybe it was an argument with a child over going to bed on time. Maybe it was an argument with your spouse over a major purchase. Maybe it was an argument with a neighbor over politics. Maybe it was an argument with a coworker over a missed deadline on a project.

Whatever the topic of the argument, it's safe to say, there was conflict. And saying there was conflict is just another way of saying that there was a lack of agreement. A lack of unity.

In this sinful world, people are rarely unified. Everybody has their own opinion about how the country should be run. How wars should be started or ended. How money should be spent. How children should be raised. How streets should be kept safe. There's no unity. No agreement. Just constant conflict.

There's a reason for that. And it has to do with the guy we talked about last week: the Old Adam. We know that the Old Adam is sinful, of course. But there's one particular sin that he's really good at: idolatry. The Old Adam loves to make idols. The Old Adam loves to worship idols. The Old Adam is constantly searching for a new god to follow.

Because as arrogant and selfish as he might be, deep down the Old Adam knows that he is small and helpless and afraid. And he needs a god to provide for him and protect him. And if he doesn't find that provision and protection in a false god, then he he might end up turning back to the one true God. And that's the last thing he wants to do.

And so the Old Adam creates gods based upon his own needs. His own fears. His own desires. And he worships that false god with his entire being. And that leads directly to conflict.

How? Well, think about it. Take a husband and wife arguing about money. And in this hypothetical couple, the wife has made a god out of the security that comes from a healthy savings account. And the husband has made a god out of the pleasure that comes from having the nicest home with the newest gadgets.

And then they argue. Because she can't worship her god if he's always spending the money that belongs to her idol. And he can't worship his god if she's always socking away the money that belongs to his idol.

And they are in constant conflict. Because even if they go to church every Sunday and they sing the hymns and they baptize their children. When they go home they are worshipping different gods. They are a house divided. And if they keep worshipping those false gods, that house may not stand for much longer.

The root cause of a lot of conflict in our lives, in our country, and in our world is idolatry. My Old Adam wants to worship his false god – the thing he fears, loves, and trusts above all things – and he doesn't care one bit about what you want. And that is not a recipe for agreement. That is not a formula for unity.

In our Epistle lesson for today, Peter spells this out for us. He begins by saying exactly what I've been talking about: *“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”* All of you, have unity of mind. Sympathize with each other's needs. Love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Have a tender, compassionate, listening heart. Be humble in your attitude, without arrogance or selfishness or pride.

But how do we achieve that? How do we find that unity among us? The unity that ends these sorts of conflicts. More importantly, the unity that brings true reconciliation. That brings not just an end to the arguing, but sympathy and love and compassion and humility. That brings a restoration of the relationship.

Is it just a question of trying harder to agree? No, as long as the Old Adam is in charge, he will have his false god to worship. And any agreement will be a facade. A lie that eventually crumbles back into conflict.

No, what is needed is true unity. We need to actually be in agreement. We need to actually be worshipping the same God. What's needed is repentance. And that's what Peter describes in verses 10-12.

*“Whoever desires to love life and see good days,”* Whoever wants to end the arguing, end the fighting, end the constant strife that plagues marriages and families and churches and communities. *“Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.”* The problem here is not just our argument. That's merely the tip of the iceberg.

The root cause of this argument is the evil that coming from within us. As Jesus says, evil comes from the heart and then it spills out of our lips. The root cause of this argument is the Old Adam that we've given control over our lives so that we worship a false god. And now this evil idolatry within us is causing us to say truly evil things. Causing us to speak deceit like children of the father of lies.

So what do we do? *“Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”* You turn away from evil. You know what that turning away is called? Repentance. That's what repentance is. It is seeing the Old Adam inside of you. Seeing the evil in your heart. Seeing the sins it causes you to commit with your lips. And saying, “No, this is wrong. I'm turning away from it.”

Because, you see, you aren't just an Old Adam, bound in your idolatry. You are baptized. You have a new identity. You are a new man. A new creation. Walking in newness of life.

And that new man is capable of looking at himself and saying, “No, this is wrong. This is sinful. This is the Old Adam talking. And he needs to be silenced.

When Luther talks about drowning the Old Adam in the waters of baptism, he's talking about repentance. Because repentance only happens when there is a new man within you. The Old Adam certainly can't repent. He doesn't believe he's doing anything wrong. In his arrogance, he always believes he's doing the right thing.

Only the new man whom God has brought to life within us can admit that he did something sinful. That he has been chasing after a false god, and that idolatry has brought conflict into his life. Only in humility can he say, “God, I'm sorry. Show me your path forward. Show me where I should walk in newness of life.”

*“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.”* The new man is a righteous man. And his prayer of repentance is always heard and his sins are always forgiven.

He is a righteous man whose prayer is heard because Christ has given him His righteousness. Christ, a man who committed no sin, took on the sins of the Old Adam and paid their debt. The eyes of the Lord turned away from his own Son. He cried out, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,”* but the Father's ears were deaf to his prayer.

The face of the Lord was against Jesus, as if he were the one who had done evil and not us. So that by faith in his death and resurrection, we might seek peace with God. We might find peace with God. We might be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

And so Peter exhorts us to unity and sympathy, love and compassion, humility and reconciliation. Not as something the Old Adam can do. But as the blessing we have obtained through our baptismal rebirth. We have peace with God and so we can have peace with one another. We have unity with God and so we can have unity with one another.

But not without repentance. Not without first drowning the Old Adam and all his idolatry and all his lies. Not without admitting to ourselves and to God that we have had gods before him. We have feared, loved, and trusted in the things of this world.

But we have also turned away from evil. We want to do good. We want his help in doing good. We want to do good together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we can do that, then there is hope that the argument might just be over for good. Amen.