

Parents get angry at their kids or disappointed. They discipline them. Why do they concern themselves with this? They could run from the responsibility of being a parent. Why do they engage? They love them, and that is what the child needs! If left to go down the wrong path, there will be destruction and shame. Is it hard to rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction? Will there sometimes be defiance, or anger, or tears...from both parties? Is it worth it? God thought so. God loved each one of his people. He treated them as a parent their child. The LORD confronts his people through the prophet Ezekiel to put a stop to their excuses and condemn their idolatries that they might repent and turn to the LORD and he would have mercy on them. In love, God does this for us too.

God gives us a new heart and a new spirit.

- 1) God is just in all he does to us and for us.**
- 2) It is God's great joy to work repentance and give life.**

"The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "The parents eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge"? "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child – both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. Yet the Israelites say, "The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? "Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32).

When you learn a new language, a marker of great understanding is when you grasp the idioms of the language, the sayings, the proverbs, and what they mean. "Six of one, half dozen of the other," means you have two choices and they are equal. Pick one. Some idioms reveal truths. Some are downright misleading or wrong. The Israelites captive in Babylon popularized an idiom that proved to be a lying excuse for their own sins and blunted God's calls to repentance – "Parents eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." They meant our forefathers did bad stuff and now we are paying the price for it. "It's not our fault." Is God misdirecting his justice? Never. **God is just in all he does to us and for us.**

"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child – both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die." God goes on oath. We use oaths in court to remind a person that they can't lie to God nor should they lie here. God swears by himself to show just how serious he is about us. No more of this nonsense. Sometimes a parent silences the room by the volume of their voice. "What's going on in here?" The arguing stops, and the two kids fighting look up from their double headlock, knowing there is no escape from their parent's glare, and no denying the truth. God show us - we are accountable to him. He cares.

"Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just. Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?" It is exhausting for parents; trying to sort out who is at fault as they sit there blaming each other. Mom's favorite figurine is now in three pieces. One kid threw the ball and blames the other for not catching it. The third one knew better as they were watching and laughing it all take place instead of telling them to stop or getting mom or dad. All of them knew they were not allowed to throw that ball in the house. You send them all to their rooms. All are to blame.

Have we outgrown this? Isn't it always someone else's fault? We blame the parent, the child, the friend, the teacher, the system, the spouse, the stress, the genes, each other, even God. We are unjust, aren't we? God is right when he says, "Enough!" Stop blaming others or blaming him. God doesn't get it wrong. It is time to repent – to turn in sorrow over our sin, stop pointing the finger at others, and go to God for forgiveness. *"if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life."*

God calls us out because he is calling us back. What love God had to see the course through among sinful people who hold on to false proverbs and deny responsibility. In Jesus' parable of the two sons in our Gospel lesson, neither was great, only the first son was led to repent and do the work his father asked him to do. We aren't the hero. Jesus is. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus came to die on the cross for both sons, but like the first son, he wants us to turn from our evil ways and see and believe in him. This is why he came – for you. Sometimes he has to shut down every avenue to you so you stop blaming others, and look to him. Jesus is the one whom God sent to ensure that he could be just in forgiving our sin because he was just in punishing our sin when he punished Jesus. Jesus took responsibility. God saw this through.

God didn't give up on his people or his promise to them. He sent the prophet Ezekiel to people already in exile, many who still didn't get it. God preserved a remnant who listened to Ezekiel and the other prophets, men like Daniel in Babylon, and Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah. God brought a remnant back to the promised land that a Savior would one day be born in Bethlehem as God had promised. **God is just in what he does to us and for us. It is God's great joy to work repentance and give life.**

"Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" With the most striking, loud, and loving words God shakes our souls to see our sin and impending hell which we deserve. He shakes sense into us to stop blaming him or those who went before. We are sinners in a sinful world. We have sinned, but we have a God who calls us back and wants us.

We couldn't rid ourselves of our offenses, or get ourselves *a new heart and new spirit*. So God sent one with a perfect heart and spirit. Jesus followed Our Father perfectly in all he did and spent his time bringing others back, reaching out to even the hardest of hearts, and bidding people follow him and see their Savior. On the cross Jesus asked God to forgive his tormentors. On that cross he showed perfect trust in his Father's will for him to die for you and me. He suffered hell for your sin and the sins of blaming others or things rather than take responsibility. He took responsibility for you and paid your debt. He died. He rose. You live.

We couldn't *change our heart and spirit*, so he did. He gave us a new one. God later promised through Ezekiel. *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."* (Ezekiel 36:26). God provides it all. He takes our sin and wreckage from us and he gives us forgiveness, peace, *a new heart and a new spirit*. That's why we want to serve him. That's why we want to live for him. He does this today through his Word and Sacrament. That's why we confess our sins and trust the forgiveness he declares to us through his servants. That's why we remember our baptism and know the gift of the Holy Spirit is given even to us. That's why we come to the Lord's Supper and know that as we receive Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine we receive his forgiveness.

A new heart and spirit, rid of our sins by Jesus, these give us confidence not only to confess our sins to God, but to apologize to those we hurt, not let the stress dictate our attitudes, not misuse God's gifts to us, but use them wisely, be honest with ourselves, come to our God and his house to confess our sins, receive his forgiveness and let him lead us on the path we are to walk by his Word, and love one another. God is the perfect parent to us. We are his children. **God gave you a new heart and a new spirit. God is just in all he does to us and for us. It is God's great joy to work repentance and give life.** Amen.