

The Gospel in Chairs: Parts 1 of 2

Sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Hinkle
Preached in 2 Parts on September 1 & 8, 2019

(Two Volunteers man two folding chairs in the front of the church: Volunteer #1 standing behind a White Folding Chair on the congregation's right and Volunteer #2 standing behind a Black Folding Chair to the left. Chairs and Volunteers facing one another.)

This morning I want to share with you Part 1 of a 2 Part Sermon called "The Gospel in Chairs." I'll share Part 2 next Sunday.

"The Gospel in Chairs" compares two versions of the Gospel that we've learned over the years. **The first version**, which you will hear this morning, is called the Legal Version or the Penal or Juridical Version of the Gospel. In this version we have the metaphor of a courtroom drama where sin is law breaking behavior and God is a judge who needs to punish sin before he can love. Jesus comes as an Advocate to free us from the wrath of this almighty judge.

The second version, which you will hear next Sunday, could be called the Therapeutic Version or the Restorative or Curative Version. It's also known as the Patristic Version, and is a much more ancient version of the Gospel associated with the Desert Fathers, early Patristics, and even the ancient Celtic Christians. In this version, the Gospel isn't so much a courtroom drama as it is a hospital where sin is actually much more serious than lawbreaking behavior. It's a fatal disease which causes a suffering in our soul which produces all that bad behavior. So, rather than needing a judge to come and punish us, what we need is a great physician who will come to heal us at the very deepest levels of our pain.

So, here we have the "Gospel in Chairs," Part 1, the Legal Version.

In the beginning, God set Adam and Eve, Humankind, in the garden of Eden. Humankind was meant to represent God in the earth, his image, his likeness mediating the love of God and the will of God in creation.

Volunteer #2: Turn Black chair away from White

But at some point, Adam and Eve sinned and they turned their backs on God and ate the forbidden fruit. And in sinning they became sinners. And because God is holy, righteous and pure and cannot look on sin, he turned his back on them and expelled them from the garden.

Volunteer #1: Turn white chair away from black, too.

And they lived cursed lives that caused them to have to labor.

Volunteer #2: Turn Black back toward White.

Volunteer #1: White remains turned away from Black.

And no matter what they did in trying to turn to God through religion, through self-righteous acts, through rituals and sacrifices,.. none of that was able to reconcile them with God.

But thanks be to God, he sent his Son, Jesus, into this world to live in our stead. And he related to God in full surrender and perfect obedience in every way.

But at the end of his life, the unthinkable happens. His own people take him and crucify him on a cross.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away again.

They turn their backs on him and murder him. In doing this, the Father himself pours out his wrath upon his son and imputes the sin and the guilt of the whole world onto him. He turns his back on his own son, allows him to go into the grave for us, and condemns him in our place.

Volunteer #2: Collapse down the black chair and lay it flat on the floor.

Well, thanks be to God, he raised Jesus from the dead and restored him to the heavenly places.

Volunteer #2: Raise up the black chair and turn it towards the white.

Volunteer #1: Turns white chair towards black.

And now anybody who believes that Jesus has done this in our place, that he has taken the full punishment of God and has suffered and satisfied the full penalty of sin, can live in fellowship with him and be restored. All those who believe can walk with Jesus. And some day, when we go to be with him, we will enjoy eternity together forever.

But,.. for those who have turned their backs on this Gospel,

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

who have not received the love and forgiveness of Jesus,.. God, in his wrath, must allow them to go their way.

Volunteer #1: Turn white chair away.

And finally, in the end,

Volunteer #2: Collapse and lay down the black chair.

they enter the grave and experience eternal, conscious torment forever and ever apart from God in hell.

Volunteer #2: Pick up black chair, open and turn toward white chair.

All we need to do is respond to this Gospel to receive eternal life. Amen?!

Volunteer #1: Turn white chair towards the black.

Our volunteers, who can return to their seats now. Thank you.

That is the legal view of the Gospel as we've learned it. The technical name for this Gospel is the Penal Substitutionary Satisfaction Atonement Theory. It sounds familiar, doesn't it? It should be familiar. It's the quintessential American view of the Gospel. We hear it preached by both Protestant and Catholic radio preachers and in our churches all the time. I use to preach and teach this understanding of the Gospel. And it's mentioned in our Prayer Books, too, in

Eucharistic Prayer I of Rite I. But it's only been around for about 500 years, since the Protestant Reformation. Some say it goes back to the 12th Century to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury. It's great weakness is that it pits God against Jesus. The two aren't the same: one is wrathful, the other loving. That's the two faced god, the Janus faced god. We've been preaching and worshipping the Roman pagan god Janus, not Jesus. The Bible is misused to support this view, and even though I think it's a distortion of the Gospel message, nevertheless, God has used it to bring many to salvation. Many have been repelled by this message as well and want nothing to do with the Gospel now because of it. Who wants to honor a child abusing god who kills his own son?

Frankly, when I go back to the text and read my Bible, and it doesn't matter which translation you read, I simply cannot find this legal version of the Gospel there. Your assignment for today, if you choose to accept it, is to get out your Bibles when you go home. Again, it doesn't matter what version you have. The old King James will work just as well as the newer English translations. Just read the Passion stories at the end of one of the four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. You don't have to be a Bible scholar to notice who actually demanded and carried out the crucifixion of Jesus. I think you'll be surprised.

I'll end my sermon here this morning. I'm sorry it's not very good news. But, next Sunday, I'll share a more beautiful Gospel. Amen?!

The Gospel in Chairs: Parts 2 of 2

Sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Hinkle
Preached in 2 Parts on September 1 & 8, 2019

(Two Volunteers man two folding chairs in the front of the church: Volunteer #1 standing behind a White Folding Chair on the congregation's right and Volunteer #2 standing behind a Black Folding Chair to the left. Chairs and Volunteers facing one another.)

Today I want to share Part 2 of my 2 Part Sermon called "The Gospel in Chairs." I shared Part 1 last Sunday.

"The Gospel in Chairs" compares two versions of the Gospel. **The first version**, which you heard last Sunday, is called the Legal Version of the Gospel. It's also known as the penal substitutionary satisfaction atonement theory of the Gospel. This version uses the metaphor of a courtroom drama where sin is law breaking behavior and God is a judge who needs to punish sin before he can love. You can recognize the parallels with our American legal and economic systems. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate the forbidden fruit and were

cast out of the garden as a result. Jesus comes as an Advocate. He was punished in our place as a substitution, the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and satisfied the almighty God's wrath, and we were saved. But, if we don't believe, then God will send us to hell to suffer eternal, conscious torment.

That is the legal satisfaction view of the Gospel as we've learned it. It should sound very familiar because it's the quintessential American view of the Gospel. We hear it preached by both Protestant and Catholic radio preachers and in our churches all the time. I use to preach and teach this understanding of the Gospel. And it's mentioned in our Prayer Books, too.

But, as we learned, it's only been around for about 500 years, since the Protestant Reformation. One of its great weaknesses is that it pits God against Jesus. The two aren't the same: one is wrathful, the other loving. This is the two faced god, the Janus faced god. We've been preaching and worshipping the Roman pagan god Janus, not Jesus. The Bible is misused to support this view. Frankly, when I go back to the text of the Gospels and Paul, I scratch my head because, I simply cannot find it there.

If you did the homework I suggested last Sunday, and went back to the text and read the Passion Story from one of the four Gospels, you would have noticed that nowhere does it say that God demanded Jesus' crucifixion or poured out his wrath upon his son. We humans demanded his blood. We poured out our wrath and murdered an innocent man.

Don't you think it's time we stopped blaming God for our sin? (Pause)

The second version, which you will hear this morning, is a more beautiful Gospel. We might call it the Therapeutic Version or the Restorative or Curative Version. It's also known as the Patristic Version, and it's a much more ancient version of the Gospel associated with the Desert Fathers, early Patristics, and even the ancient Celtic Christians. And it's more faithful to the text of the Bible.

In this version, the Gospel is not so much a courtroom drama as a hospital where sin is actually far more serious than lawbreaking behavior. It's a fatal disease which causes a suffering in our souls, which produces all that bad behavior we're so familiar with. So, rather than needing a judge to come and punish us, what we really need is a great physician to come and heal us at the very deepest levels of our pain.

By the way, the Gospel also reveals the utter failure and bankruptcy of our so called "War on Drugs." We tried prohibition against alcohol in the 1920s and 30s and we know how well that worked. We've been fighting this "War on Drugs" since Nixon was President. Later Presidents escalated the war... to no avail. Our drug problem is worse than it's ever been, witness the recent opioid epidemic at all levels of American society. Punishment and more jails are not the answer. It simply makes lots of money for private prisons and wastes the time of our criminal justice system. Rehabilitation and healing are what's needed.

This brings us to the rediscovery of the more ancient message called the Restorative or Therapeutic or Curative version of the Gospel. It goes something like this. *(The volunteers may now come forward and man their chairs.)*

Once again, God sets humankind, created in his image, Adam and Eve, in the garden. Our great-great-grandparents were meant to be his representatives on earth, meant to walk in perfect fellowship with God.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

But one day, Adam and Eve, through temptation stumble into sin. And in stumbling into sin, something much worse than personal guilt happens. They become subject to futility and death. They receive in themselves the full penalty of their actions, which is going their own way in a self-destructive trajectory.

Volunteer #1: Pick up and walk the white chair around to face the turned away black chair.

Volunteers #1 & 2: Recenter yourselves in the space.

And what happens is God comes, and says, “Adam, Eve, where are you? What have you done?” And he realizes that they must leave the garden and go into this world or they’ll suffer eternally. So, leaving the Garden was a blessing.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair outwards again.

When they leave, what does God do? He comes with them.

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black again.

He cloths them and protects them. He gives them a life. They have children, Cain and Abel.

One day Cain decides in his jealousy to plot to murder his brother.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

And what does God do? He comes to Cain to warn him. “Cain, be careful. Sin is crouching at the door.” And here is the first mention of sin in the Bible. But, Cain pays no heed to God’s warnings and murders his brother.

And what does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around again to face the black chair.

He says, “Cain, What have you done? Where is your brother?” And he sends Cain East of Eden.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away again.

And Cain builds the first city. Notice that cultures and civilizations and empires are built on founding murders. Cain needs to go into the city and suffer the danger of one who has been known as a murderer. Notice again: humanity has moved from hunter gatherers, to herdsmen, to farmers, to city dwellers and empire builders. We see this as progress, as moving up on the evolutionary ladder. But, ... isn’t it more like descending into a morass of ever more violence, as the story of Noah’s Ark reveals? (Pause for effect) And what does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walks white chair around to face the black.

He puts a mark on his head, the mark of Cain, and he protects him for as long as he lives.

And this is the history of the People of God that over and over again we turn from God in our rebellion...

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away from the white.

and what does God do? He comes looking for us.

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black.

He warns us, he chastises us and he makes a way to reconcile us. (Note: chastising is not the same as punishing. It means to discipline and teach. Very different.)

And even as Israel went off through their time with Abraham, with Moses and with David, we see all sorts of sins, all sorts of wickedness.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away from white.

And what does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black yet again.

He comes and finds Abraham. He comes and finds Moses. He comes and finds David, who liked hot-tubs too much. He comes and finds his people and he offers a way to repentance and reconciliation. The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New.

Here is a man with little man syndrome who in his greed and insecurity betrays his people and becomes a tax collector and works for the Roman oppressors.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away from the white.

He loses all his friends and he steals from his neighbors. He's despised and rejected as a traitor and collaborator with the enemy Romans and loses his community. And what does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walk the white chair around to face the black.

God becomes man and walking under a tree one day, looks up and says, "Zacheus, come down from there. I want to have dinner with you. I want to be your friend. I won't reject you. I'll restore you."

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

Here is a woman who in the brokenness of her heart and in the longing she has for love, moves from marriage to marriage to marriage. And after divorcing five men, she's now living with another who is not her husband. And what does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black.

He comes and sits beside her at a well, and he says to her, "The very thing you are longing for is the waters of life. And I can give that to you. And when I give that to you, you will never thirst again."

This is the Gospel of Reconciliation, the Gospel of Restoration where the Great Physician comes and finds us. But you know, in this story, too, the

unthinkable happens. Humans take this Christ and we crucify him, and we turn from him, and we die to our own conscience.

Volunteer #2: Collapse black chair and lay it down on the floor.

And even in that death, what does God do? He says, “I forgive you.” And he says even if you make your bed in Sheol, I am there. And he follows us into the grave.

Volunteer #1: Collapse the white chair and lay it down on top the black.

But this is also the God who says, “I am the one who was dead, but now I am alive!”

Volunteer #1: Set back up the white chair.

“I am the one who holds the keys of death and Hades.” And the question for us today is,.. if Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades, what do you think he will do with them? Yes! He will raise us up!

Volunteer #2: Stand the black chair up, too and face the white.

And for those who turn from God

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away again.

and say “I don’t want that love.” And in our freedom of choice we can do that. What does God do?

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black yet again.

In his wild passion for his people, he pursues us like the very hound of heaven. And the fire of that love will feel like hell. That love will feel like torment as long as we keep running.

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair around.

And as long as we run, God will run,..

Volunteer #1: Take the white chair around to face the black, moving faster this time.

chasing us because his mercy endures for how long? Forever!

And so this one who conquered death, who conquered the grave, who took the keys and led a host of captives out of the grave, now pursues us forever. He wants you to know something about this second version of the Gospel, and that is this. He is always towards you. And when you run from him

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face black.

he is always towards you. And when you ignore him

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face black.

he always comes and speaks. And when we try to flee from him

Volunteer #2: Turn black chair away.

– and don’t you wish you could? –

Volunteer #1: Walk white chair around to face the black.

God is perpetually there, always wanting to love us, always wanting to welcome us, always inviting us home.

(Acknowledge the Volunteers as they return to their seats.)

And so, this is the Restorative version of the Gospel, the Gospel of Reconciliation. It is truer to the text of the Gospels, truer even than our Books of Common Prayer. We must go back to the text and rediscover this revelation Jesus brings to us and leave behind the distortions of religion. This is a more beautiful Gospel and it truly is Good News. Amen?!

Source: This “Gospel in Chairs” came from an Eastern Orthodox priest in Colorado named Fr. Anthony Carbo. A Canadian theologian named Brad Jersak, and Brian Zahnd, an American pastor from Missouri, adapted Fr. Carbo’s original presentation and I base my sermon on their adaptation.