

A Sermon by the Reverend Marsha E. Brown,
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a 501c3 non-profit providing food and utility and rent assistance to our neighbors.

“Kinship with all through Christ”

2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

I imagine that here in this room there are folks who could use help in reconciling with others. I imagine that every one of us could! Maybe it's not just that we never want to see that person again, but all we can muster is an awkward bare minimum of words when we have to speak to them. Or maybe we don't speak to them at all. Or it could be worse than that- angry outbursts when we try to say the simplest things..... I imagine that most of us go through life merely tolerating at least one or two others in our lives day after day, year after year. As we age, we find plenty of situations to get crosswise with each other. Many opportunities to get downright angry over one thing or another-and hear this: anger is not wrong- it's just the holding on to it and lashing out at ourselves or others that is wrong.

Paul had plenty of reason to be angry at the church in Corinth. He had spent so much time with them, helping them to grow in faith and practice as Christ followers and then some turned against him. Some said that he was a charlatan, a phony, that he was not leading them in the true gospel. They said, “How dare he call himself an apostle as if he really knew Jesus like the other disciples did!!! He's a fake!” They had turned against him in the deepest way. And we can only imagine how much these words hurt. So what did he do? He turned to God in his

despair and angst. And then he wrote these words that I am about to read for us which were written to that church at Corinth. Listen for God's word to you in the passage from 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21 from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible:

“¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;^[a] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,^[b] we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^[c] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God.

Nanette Sawyer, a pastor in Chicago says that what this passage boils down to is a hard question for each one of us: “Does God see Jesus when God sees you?”¹ That is what Paul is asking them to do- be ambassadors for Christ everywhere you go. Be ‘little Jesus’s’ to everyone you meet in any situation in any circumstance.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest in New Mexico has profound things to say about the indwelling of Christ in us. “The clear goal and direction of the biblical revelation is toward full mutual indwelling, where ‘the mystery is Christ within you, your hope of glory (Colossians

¹Nannette Sawyer, The hardest question, Boasting in the Heart, 2013,

1:27). He goes on in his writings to say that unity with Christ is what the goal of faith is. That the incarnation happens inside of us. Which is basically what Paul is talking about in our passage today. We are Christ to the world. That is what happens in communion. We don't just have the presence of Jesus among us- we take the body of Christ in our bodies- we are ONE. And when we leave this place we should be as Christ to the world.

So how would that be?

Did Christ avoid people he was mad at?

Did Christ look down on people he thought he was better than? Or that he thought were entitled or lazy or not worthy?

Did Christ consider himself better than others and treat them in an unsavory or an indifferent way?

When I was in the hospital for 5 days a week or so ago, I had one particularly difficult night. I couldn't breathe and the breathing treatments made me cough and my ribs hurt from all the coughing and I couldn't sleep and everything seemed like it was not getting any better any time soon. The nurse taking care of me noticed that I was crying after the treatment and asked me if I needed medication for the anxiety that such huge doses of steroids and breathing treatments cause. I said yes. She pulled up a chair next to my bed and she sat down. It was 4 am. You want some tea? Some coffee? No thanks, I said. She said, "So what is going on?" And we talked. About me and my life and concerns. And we talked about her life and her concerns for about an hour. We shared each other's pain and hope and dreams. She went beyond cure to give me care. She was a friend to me in a needy time. She helped me to feel better by the gift of listening-so much so, that I didn't even need the medication an hour later. It was a holy time. Holy.

This week when I was back at the hospital to see the doctor for my follow-up visit, I walked over to the hospital and left her a note of thanks and a poem that reminded me of our time together. I think it has the essence of being Jesus to others, as Paul encouraged the Corinthians and us all to do..... To treat all people as our kin. The poem is called ‘Wild Geese’ by Mary Oliver

“You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.”

The truth is that we are loved and cherished beyond our wildest dreams- all of us. We belong. And we live in a world where most of us don't know that..... so, know that today, OK? And BE that love to others in the life you live. Amen.