

August 20, 2017

Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Let us read again from our scriptures this morning. “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Do we understand these words? Do we believe they are true? If they are true how do we apply them to ourselves? Does the love of Christ urge you and me on? Do we believe that Jesus died for everyone; really, for everyone? What does it mean that you and I are to live for Jesus not ourselves?

Paul continued “we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us... For our sake he made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

Ambassadors speak for the one who sends them and accurately report back what they hear. An ambassador speaks only the words from the king. Are we real ambassadors, speaking for our king, or do we echo the words of TV talking heads?

Kitty and I are blessed with a large extended family. We are spread from Maryland to Alaska, California and Colorado, Arizona, Washington and Idaho, South Korea, the Indian Ocean, the Philippines and Honduras.

What the unsaved members of our family see and hear from Christians is extremely important. Our heart's desire is that they all be saved; that they all would believe that Jesus is Lord and place their trust in him. What they hear from those around them, particularly people who call themselves Christians, is incredibly important.

Our prayer is that what they hear will not turn them away from God. I have been wrestling with what to do as I find myself too easily wrapped up in my own anger and judgement as I read the news and hear people claiming to be Christian say things which I know sadden my Lord and hurt his message of mercy, justice and faith. Even yesterday a headline in part of our daily paper declared evangelical support of the president.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31). Our prayer must be that we not say or do anything that separates people from God's love and Christ Jesus.

This is about the cross: reconciliation between God and us and between us and other people (point to cross). While in Frederick Maryland last month I was encouraged listening to sermons by Richard Fredericks the pastor of The Damascus Road Community Church entitled ‘Us versus them’. His message helped focus me on my role in God's reconciliation. Some of the contents of this message reflect his words.

An evangelist is by definition one who declares. An evangelist is not a pastor who gives instruction or provides pastoral care. Therefore, we are all to be evangelists. My understanding

of the phrase ‘evangelical Christian’ means a person who is declaring Jesus: not declaring a party or power or some person but Christ and him crucified. I want to be identified with Jesus.

Evangelical Christians are to declare the good news of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. If someone does not declare this message or says or supports things not Christian are they being small a anti-Christ? This is what I have been struggling with. What is my faith and where is it in the world we find ourselves today?

How many times must Jesus speak about what we say before we believe him? Speaking to religious teachers and leaders he said, “How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) What comes out of our mouths does come from our hearts.

Today our culture has taken the phrase ‘evangelical Christian’ and made it sound Pharisaical: it is being used as part of a definition of a political position.

We see anger today rising out of fear, hurt and frustration. People are crying out for security and significance. What is said in the name of Jesus matters a great deal.

We are so confused between Satan’s lies and the teachings of Christ that even as we worship this morning our government is sending over 100 Chaldean Christians back to Iraq while at the same time voicing concern for Christians in that part of the world.

We must be instruments of reconciliation, not agents of evil. Peter writes “Discipline yourself; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

What is our witness, yours and mine? What is the witness of the Body of Christ today to our families, fellow citizens and to the world?

We gravitate to people and things and groups that affirm what we believe. When we gravitate to falsehoods we get further and further away from the truth.

We are to hide God’s word in our heart so we will not sin against him. We must be faithful to God’s word sharing it in such a way that people hear grace not judgment or condemnation. Grace is the only way to reconciliation: it is the way God chose for you and me so it must be the best way for everyone.

In our hunger for affirmation we close ourselves off to the voice of God the Holy Spirit and we miss the warnings.

Paul’s wrote “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God: righteousness, salvation, truth, good news, faith and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God

And word says “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not

counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”
(2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. For God it is about the process, how we get to the end. God has already determined the end. What we do during the process has eternal consequences. What does reconciliation mean to you? What does it mean in the body of Christ? How does it meet the need of those who are seeking to know God?

The cross of crucifixion reconciled us to God and made possible our call to reconciliation. We are the process – the living, breathing witnesses of grace. Jesus’ peace is not the world’s peace. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled: do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

When we glorify God in ALL we do that is the process. We often forget we are saved by grace through faith and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

All of us are selfish by our human nature (yup, born this way and God knows it). Only God’s grace and love in us can change us. For God the process is what counts – what do we do in getting to the end? How do we proceed through life?

To start we need to remember what God had Zechariah declare. “Not by power nor by might but by my spirit says the Lord.” (Zechariah 4:6)

Humility, compassion, grace – they were signs of weakness before Jesus. Now these words should describe us, describe Christians. Describe what we say. Describe what we do. Our struggle cannot be won by weapons or power

We are to view everything thru the mind (lens) of Christ. ‘Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, and peacemakers who will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:7-9)

Our words and actions are important. The enemy of our souls will take our wrong words and our wrong actions whenever possible and use them to encourage unbelievers to reject Christ. We must be careful what we say and what we support.

We are called to a ministry of reconciliation, not judgement. As Christians we get to recalibrate letting God renew a right spirit in us every morning. We can begin each day seeking ways to be peace makers, people of reconciliation.

With the Holy Spirit it is possible to bring light where there is darkness. Darkness can never drive out darkness only light can do this. We must not add to someone’s darkness. We must listen for the Holy Spirit, God’s quiet voice of reconciliation calling people, for it is God’s will that none would perish.

We can be people of reconciliation. We can because God has reconciled us to himself. Do others see us as reconcilers, ambassadors of peace or as something else?

A good way to evaluate a person’s Christian faith is to listen to what they say for it comes from their hearts. Jesus confirmed this a number of times.

“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” (Mathew 15:11)

And again Jesus says “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.” (Mathew 15:18)

Luke recorded Jesus saying “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks”. (Luke 6:45)

We are to lift Jesus. He says he, the word of truth, divides. It is not up to us to divide but rather to reconcile.

We are to be peace makers not just peace keepers.

What people hear from Christians and what they see Christians do will make a difference. The Old Testament tells us do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8) Jesus tells us ‘This is the work of God; believe in him whom God has sent.’ (John 6:29)

I believe there are three religious myths standing in the way of reconciliation. 1) God helps those who help themselves. 2) It is OK to choose the lessor of two evils. 3) The ends justify the means.

Do we say God helps those who help themselves as if God’s grace isn’t for everyone? What do we tell the mother working 2 and maybe 3 jobs to support her and her children? Do we say if you would just help yourself God would help you? That is wrong. Those who are blessed with financial security are they more blessed by God. Or did they do more to help themselves than this lady? Through the eyes of Jesus which is worse this lady or me if I condemn her?

Never in the Old or the New Testaments do we read that any type of evil is OK. How can we tell others sin is sin: it does not matter if it a large sin or a small sin and then accept an argument that the lessor of two evils is OK. We are to hate evil in any form, period, nothing subtle about it: we are to hate evil.

Myth three ‘the ends justify the means’. The ends can never justify un-Christ like means. God cares deeply about the process. If the means are not his means then the end has no value. Our agreement with wrong means will get used by the enemy of our souls. Only God’s way can bear fruit.

We are servants of the living God. We are citizens of a great country. We are not a voting bloc or political body. We are part of the Body of Christ. We are never to be complicit in un-Christ like policies. That would be anti-Christ. What do Peter and the Apostles say about our role with government. They say “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” (Acts 5:29)

We are to be peace makers God’s children going about the work of reconciliation. Sometimes it just seems easier to watch evil than to love others. But if we choose God’s way, if we choose to be evangelicals declaring the grace of God in Christ Jesus God himself will be with to accomplish his process in our lives and the lives of others.

We are gathered together this morning to worship, seeking God's grace and giving thanks to God for his grace that knows no end.

Will others come here and join us? It will be because of what they hear and what they see.

An evangelical Christian should be a person who announces Good News to those who do not know that Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again and that God loves them right now, right where they are! Who will proclaim the gospel, the Good news of Jesus Christ! We can be instruments of reconciliation between every person and God and between people, bringing peace one to another.

Prayer

O God we live by faith, a gift of your grace in our Lord Jesus. Do not let us quench your Holy Spirit but free us to be instruments of your grace. Lord we know we are forgiven but we confess the ease in which we turn from grace to power and activities that are not peace making. They do not result in others finding their rest in your Son, our Savior. O God, please be quick to check our impulses to open ourselves to evil. Lord, save our families and those we know and the strangers we meet. We pray in the name of Jesus.