

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2015

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This past Thursday was the 65th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War. Communist North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. The war lasted until July 27, 1953 when an armistice was signed. The armistice was an agreement to stop fighting. It has never led to a peace treaty and the hostile relations between North and South Korea continue to this day. In fact, in the last few years North Korea has said it won't hold to the armistice and is ready to attack South Korea at any time.

The struggle between North and South Korea helps illustrate how difficult it is to resolve conflict between two sides who don't like each other. It has been over sixty years since the last shot was fired, but the two countries are still at odds with each other. They have not been able to reconcile their differences. The concept of reconciliation is one of the main thoughts in our sermon lesson today and will be our main focus as we explore how we are reconciled to God.

Reconciliation is defined like this: **to become friendly with (someone) after estrangement or to re-establish friendly relations between (two or more people)**. The process of reconciliation brings two or more opposing parties together, helps them work out their differences and allows them to be able to move on with their lives. Reconciliation is a wonderful process and a true blessing to the parties who are brought back together.

The apostle Paul tells us about a glorious reconciliation in our lesson today. He says, **"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** The glorious reconciliation Paul details is the reconciliation between God and man.

You might wonder, "What makes this reconciliation glorious? Why did we even need it in the first place?" Well, God and man needed to be reconciled because of one of the fundamental differences between God and man: God is perfect and man is not. Man is sinful. It wasn't always this way. Adam and Eve were created perfect. They were able to live in perfect harmony with God and did live in perfect harmony with God and without need for reconciliation.

However, Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They ate fruit from a tree which they were told not to eat from and their sin created disharmony between God and man. Their sin plunged the world into chaos. Sin brought death, pain and suffering to a world which was never supposed to experience these things. We still see the impact of sin in our world today. We experience the pain of destroyed relationships. We see people who are subjected to endless suffering. Our lives are all touched by death.

Sin is still with us today and our holy God hates it. He hates it with every fiber of his being and as a result of his hatred of sin there are very real consequences for sin. The ultimate consequence is death. Not just a physical death, but an eternal one where sin is punished forever. This is what our sin earns us. We deserve to be punished for an eternity in hell because of our sin. This is how offensive sin is to God. How could we no longer be offensive to God? We needed someone to reconcile us to God.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against

them. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We spent a lot of time detailing the conflict between God and man because it will help us understand what makes Christ’s reconciliation glorious.

Christ’s reconciliation is glorious because of the change it works in us. Reconciliation usually involves a change in two parties. Usually, two or more parties are at odds with each other and they do their best to keep the conflict alive. They purposely attack each other and make each other upset. They refuse to come together because they don’t want to move past their differences. Reconciliation helps to bring about a change in the attitudes of both parties.

The attitudes of conflicting parties soften when they are reconciled. They refuse to attack each other. They no longer work to upset the other person. They move past their differences. Reconciliation is a beautiful thing. Yet, one of God’s attributes is that he does not change. I said earlier God hates sin with every fiber of his being. How is it possible for him to love sinners who he seems to hate with every fiber of his being?

God loves sinners because of Christ’s glorious reconciliation. **“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Jesus has reconciled the entire world to God and he no longer counts our sins against us.

Jesus has changed our status before God. We are no longer simply sinners in God’s sight. We are forgiven sinners because God no longer holds our sin against us. God views us as forgiven sinners because of Jesus. Jesus came into this world to reconcile us to God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born without sin. He never knew what it meant to commit a sin. Yet, God took him who never knew what it was like to commit a sin and made him sin when he died on the cross.

God no longer saw Jesus on the cross. He saw our sins instead. This reality led him to let all of his fury and hatred loose on Jesus while he hung on the cross since all he saw was sin. Jesus endured God’s wrath on the cross in order to reconcile us to God. He endured the full fury of God to change our status in God’s sight. God no longer views us as simply sinners. He views us as forgiven sinners who are reconciled to him through Jesus. Doesn’t this make Jesus reconciliation a glorious thing for us?

The Holy Spirit uses this message of reconciliation to work a change in us. **“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** The message of reconciliation means we are new creatures who live for Christ rather than ourselves.

How can we be new creations who live for Christ rather than ourselves? Paul instructs us, **“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”** Paul says we are Christ’s ambassadors in this world. An

ambassador is an important person. He is the official representative of his country in a foreign land. He is supposed to communicate only what his country wants him to communicate.

He does a good job of representing his country when he obeys his government and communicates what it wants him to communicate. He fails to do his job when he doesn't obey his government and communicates what he wants to instead. We have been given the task of being Christ's ambassadors in this world. He wants us to be faithful ministers of the reconciliation he has won for us. He uses us to beg and plead with others to believe this message of reconciliation and be reconciled to God.

God wants us to clearly communicate this message of reconciliation to the world around us. This is not an easy task because the world around us hates both message of reconciliation and message bearer. This past week has been a stark reminder of this truth in our country. The Supreme Court has declared same sex marriage legal throughout our country. It appears this ruling means Christ's ambassadors who say homosexuality is a sin will be targets of persecution.

What should we do? How can we continue to be Christ's faithful ambassadors in this world when this world is trying to redefine what God calls sinful behavior? **"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."** We will continue to beg and plead with people to be reconciled to God. We will continue to point out people's need for a savior and continue to point them to the savior.

We will do this because this is what a faithful ambassador does. He continues to share the message his king wants him to share. Our king wants us to plead with people to be reconciled to God. I understand it is hard to do when we are deeply saddened by people's actions. I understand it is hard to be a faithful ambassador when people rejoice over what causes us to weep. It is perfectly fine to be saddened over what has happened. It breaks my heart to see such rejoicing.

Yet, we need to be on guard against our sadness. Why? What does sadness and grief often lead to? Doesn't it lead to frustration and anger? Don't frustration and anger lead us to lash out against who caused us sadness? Doesn't unchecked frustration and anger lead us to react with the same hatred and venom which people have directed toward us? Are we acting as Christ's ambassadors when we react with anger and frustration or are we trying to get back at others?

Christ's faithful ambassadors will continue to say what he wants us to say. **"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."** He wants us to continue to beg and plead with people to be reconciled to God. Why does he want us to beg and plead with others to be reconciled to God? It is because our begging and pleading demonstrate how we have been reconciled to God.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." We beg and plead with others because we understand God doesn't count our sins against us and we want them to believe this message too. Amen.