

Reconciled in the name of Christ
Jubilee Mennonite Church
November 4, 2018

Purpose: To place the work of indigenous settlers reconciliation into the context of the work of Christ.

Message: As people of God's peace, extending the work of Christ, we are invited into the work of reconciliation where ever dividing walls have placed between us.

This sermon will review and wrap up our reconciliation series.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (I will read); Psalm 146 (please read)

Synopsis: Being followers of Christ, we are invited into who Jesus and is and what Jesus is about. God reaches out in Christ and brings us toward God, opening the way in salvation for acceptance and love. We are invited into this relationship which then calls us to go out into the all the world and build relationships that mirror the way of Christ. As we sit with our indigenous neighbours, and work toward a new future together, we are invited to speak truth, to be honest with one another, proceeding in humility and respect for where we have been together. This work take courage, wisdom, and most of all love: God's love in us that brings all things together.

Reconciliation is not about doing the politically popular thing, nor being less of who we are as people of our faith, but rather living fully in the name of Christ, naming where we have been, and building the kingdom of God together.

The world is overcome not through destruction, but through reconciliation. Not ideals, nor programs, nor conscience, nor duty, nor responsibility, nor virtue, but only God's perfect love can encounter reality and overcome it. Nor is it some universal idea of love, but rather the love of God in Jesus Christ, a love genuinely lived, that does this.

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Meditations on the Cross

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (Message)

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Our firm decision
is to work from this focused center:

One man died for everyone.
That puts everyone in the same boat.

He included everyone in his death
so that everyone could also be included in his life,
a resurrection life,
a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

¹⁶⁻²⁰ Because of this decision
we don't evaluate people
by what they have or how they look.

We looked at the Messiah that way once
and got it all wrong, as you know.
We certainly don't look at him that way anymore.

Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone
united with the Messiah gets a fresh start,
is created new.

The old life is gone; a new life burgeons!

Look at it!
All this comes from the God
who settled the relationship between us and him,
and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.

God put the world square with himself through the Messiah,
giving the world a fresh start
by offering forgiveness of sins.

God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.
We're Christ's representatives.
God uses us to persuade men and women
to drop their differences
and enter into God's work of making things right between them.

We're speaking for Christ himself now:
Become friends with God;
he's already a friend with you.

Over the last weeks we have been talking about values. Big values which are big ideas. Values that steer who we are, underlie our sense of self, the why and where fore of what we do. Most of the time these are the things that we take for granted, leave unspoken and assumed. Its the stuff of natural law: we know that we want to be truthful, honest, courageous, respectful, loving, wise, and humble people. It is the list of virtues that we hold out in front of ourselves as the stuff that we would like our children to be, and our grand children to become. I'll be honest; when I sat down to plan these sermons in this series, I was not thrilled by the prospect. Not only were we going into subject matter I am not very well read on in terms of the indigenous way of life, I was not at all convinced that there would be all that much to say on the basic notions of values. Surely we have all been here before, it seems. But as we have worked our way through these themes, and articulated the deep meaning of these essential ways of being, not only have we learned a bit more about the indigenous way of thinking, however modestly, I think we have also had the opportunity to deepen our understandings of these core values that lie at the centre of both Christian and native teaching, but also been given the opportunity to question about the deep meaning of what all of this means, moving from the stuff that we take for granted into the light of day and the way of being in our own lives and world. We can all use the opportunity to ask these questions more deeply of ourselves from time to time. We are strengthened and called to new depth of authenticity when we live our values to their fullest.

Along the way, you have heard me talking about how these values support and connect to reconciliation and the work of the church. But I did not spend a great deal of time on why the project of reconciliation—of sitting with the way things are in our world and working to bring them closer to the way things are intended to be—is the work of the church. To be sure, we are speaking here as we must about the work of the deep, abiding divide between the indigenous peoples of this land that we share and we who have come at various moments to share this place, but we could be talking about the work of bringing things together on the whole. Why reconciliation? Why difficult conversations and uncomfortable notions about learning across cultures? How does Christian life and reconciliation coincide?

Let me start by speaking to reconciliation solely on the terms of the settler indigenous relationship in this place—reconciliation with a capital R if you will. For generations, we have gotten the message from all sectors of society that there was something inherently wrong with being indigenous. It has been implied in the stories that we told about what it means to come to

a new place. It was encoded in the books we read and what we were taught. And most insidiously of all, was enacted as policy and procedure of the government in the shape of residential schools where the Church colluded in the abuse and the destruction of generations of native persons, culture, and family. Even though these efforts have now ended, we reap the consequences of these policies each and every day in pain, disfunction, and loss of many of our sisters and brothers. We are called to reconciliation to be about the work of putting right in what ever small way what has been so deeply broken. We know that the past has not been good for anyone. We have not related well to our neighbours. We know this. Generations of people have been injured. It will take generations of work, education, listening, and hard conversations to bring people and relationships back to what they are meant to be. Not that this will be an easy thing or a short thing, but it is the right thing and a God thing. Because we are beloved.

We easily forget what is most fundamentally true. We forget the core of the gospel; God so loves the world, God gave his only son that we might have eternal life by believing in him and following him. Even this simple distillation of the Gospel has become confused with questions like “what does it mean to beget, to believe, and what is eternal life.” So let us keep it one step simpler. You are beloved of God. God loves you. Deeply and completely. God loves you. I don’t think we can say it too many times for ourselves: I am beloved. I am beloved. This is the most basic truth we can claim about ourselves and it is an absolutely critical one because I know I do not often start the day with this in my mind. I am beloved must be where everything starts. This is what Paul is talking about as he commends the work of Christ, the work of reconciliation to the believers of Corinth. “Once we looked at the outside,” he says, “but now we know better, and see the core of who people are, the core of belovedness that lies the centre”. It is this belovedness, revealed through and by the work of Jesus Christ that begins the work of reconciliation. Because when we know that we are beloved, we also are invited to remember the still harder lesson: so is everyone else. God so loves the world... When those who have come before us have treated people as less than who they are—the beloved children of God—and looked at what was on the outside—the stuff we all put between us and God—that we have broken relationships. It is by reclaiming and recollecting the deep truth that we are the beloved, and keeping that as our foundational truth in all things and through all things that we can reshape a future together that acknowledges what has been but is built on this central foundation. We can give all sorts of political, social, and justice rationales for the broad work of reconciliation, as

well we should, because many exist. But all of them pale by comparison to this: we are beloved. And out of that beloved identity we are called to but things right between the other beloved peoples of the world.

Reconciliation is the work of the followers of Christ because it is the work of Christ. When we follow Christ, we are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. And transformed people see with the vision of reconciliation before them, and that has several consequences. First, we apply reconciliation in the world as a guiding principle, no matter what our work happens to be. This means that when we encounter conflict, we don't just see sides with which to align, but rather an opportunity to stand in between and perhaps offer ourselves as a listening ear and mediating force. This means seeing people as people first, a source of profits second, if at all. This means seeing people's pain and dislocation as not merely the psychological debris of a messy life in a messy world, but also a symptom of a life in need of connection to something bigger than themselves, the belovedness at the core that we all require

Second, we fight against evil as strongly as anyone else in the world; we must. But as transformed people, our weapons must be the weapons of reconciliation and relationship, not division, death, and injury that have long been arrayed against the evils of the world. This includes our language. It is way too easy to speak for peace with words that condemn and vilify those who see the world differently than we do. Reconciliation must be at the center of our vision and our protest, emulating the way of Christ not just in policy but in practice.

Third, too often we have made the false division between the call of peace and the call of evangelism. They are one and the same work within the frame of reconciliation. We act for peace to reconcile the world toward the kingdom of God, to bring them more and more into harmony. We spread the gospel of Christ to reconcile people toward the God who would reconcile with them out of passionate love, and persistent pursuance. It is the same message, and cannot be separated into neat divisions, even if we would prefer that would not be that way. We cannot place them in opposition.

Core to our Christian faith is praying the prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples. The part of the prayer we always stumble over goes like this: Forgive us our debts (or trespasses or sins) as we forgive our debtors (or those who trespass against us or those who sin against us). Stumbling over these words seems indicative (in a surreal way) of how we stumble around forgiveness; the work of reconciliation. It requires us to name what's hard, and to strip down to

those bare values that define us to move forward. May we be ambassadors of reconciliation in the relationships with our neighbours, and our ways with all who is beloved of God—everyone we meet.

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