

**Reconciliation, centre of our work**  
Jubilee Mennonite Church  
November 19, 2017

**Purpose:** To declare that the work of reconciliation is our core purpose as disciples of Christ.

**Message:** As ambassadors of reconciliation, we are called into the work of the kingdom where we find it.

**The big idea:** We are called in discipleship, out of community to be about the work of reconciliation.

**Text:** II Corinthians 5:12-21, Psalm 90:1-8;15-17

**Synopsis:** There are consequences to where we focus. When we focus ourselves on our aim, we often will find that we become occupied with that particular thing. If our aim and purpose in life is success is primarily success, we will become occupied with doing what it is that is needed to succeed. If it is training for athletics, we focus and improve over time. But when our focus becomes Christ and faith, the consequence of that focus is that we hear again and again the call to be about working within the pain of the world as a continuation of Jesus' mission on the earth.

**2 Corinthians 5:12-21** <sup>12</sup> We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. <sup>13</sup> For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> ¶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of Go

2 Corinthians 5:12-21

We're not saying this to make ourselves look good to you.  
We just thought it would make you feel good,  
proud even,  
that we're on your side  
and not just nice to your face as so many people are.  
If I acted crazy, I did it for God;  
if I acted overly serious, I did it for you.  
Christ's love has moved me to such extremes.  
His love has the first and last word in everything we do.

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.  
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 God 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.  
How you ask. In Christ.  
God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong,  
so we could be put right with God.

One of the biggest critiques of Christianity is that it is irrelevant to the way that the world is. The gulf between the notions of faith, hope, and love seem remote at best to the way of winner take all capitalism, violent suppression of those who disagree with us, and the demands of narrow self-interest is what rules the day. Faith holds not truck with the way that the world *really* is, it is claimed, and there is little point pretending otherwise, the argument goes, and absent any realistic application of the way of Christ in the world, there is not much point. Faith from this standpoint is largely illusory. Here is the thing. By in large, I would not tremendously disagree with this point of view in and of itself. If you think that the way the world operates as we find it, and that the craven ways of being really are all there is to life and living, and that the world as we see it is the world that was always meant to be, and everything is absolutely set in stone, then faith by itself does not have all that much to say to you. Where I would depart from this way of thinking, though, is with the notion that the way we encounter the world is really the way the world is. What I would argue is that the world as it, as powerful as it is, is where the illusion lies. The Kingdom of God often said to be the “Upside down Kingdom” is what is really consequential. It is that framework that has permanency and realism, and the way things are here and now, in all their terrible reality that seems absolutely and horrifically unchangeable is where the short term thinking lies.

We don't always go about arguing in this way because it sounds so completely unhinged. This? This world with all its suffering and all-too-real insanity seems so terribly concrete that it has to be real; the problems of the world too intractable as to ever be touched by something as airy of the Kingdom of God. We don't tend to argue the point in this fashion because it just makes us sound nuts, and in our drive to make the spiritual fit within the rational, scientific world we have built for ourselves, declaring the way things are as unreal is not a great way to win friends or influence people. But when you get down to it, that is the basic premise of faith: that the way things seem are not the way things are, and we are invited to bring ourselves into the full reality of God's way. Being a disciple calls us to hold the world and the Kingdom and try to reconcile the two; to bring the way things seem and the way things are in the way God created them to be into conversation. Reconciliation is what we do; it's the centre of our work as disciples, following Christ. It is our work because it was Jesus' work. As apprentices of Jesus,

we do what Jesus did. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God to the way of the world, and we are invited as to do the same.

We are Ambassadors of reconciliation. That what Paul says in most English translations in verse 19 and 20 of our reading. I went with the Message's "settling relationships" because I think it gets to the point a bit more clearly than the bigger concept of reconciliation. We think of reconciliation as the bigger stuff involving peace treaties and the like, bringing two separate groups together through distances of history and enmity. But it is much simpler than that. To reconcile simply means to bring into harmony. It is kind of like balancing your checkbook if we do that anymore. You have what you say the state of your account is and that which the bank has on record, and you have to bring them into at least reasonable conversation with each other by working through the record of each. You are bringing to different views of your accounts into harmony (you hope) to make them work out in the end to reflect the same state of affairs. That is the task of the ministry of reconciliation. We are bringing the way that the world is into closer harmony with the way that God created the world to be, the way that God intends us to be within that creation. We are continuing the work of Christ in reconciling the world and its kingdoms to the image of the kingdom of God that we hold before us.

This seems like an impossible task, that the world is poured in concrete and is never going to change, no matter how often we chisel away at it. Yet, think even within our own lifetimes. The way things were in my childhood are not the way things are today, and I am not just being nostalgic. I look forward to explaining to my children the fact that once upon a time there was such a thing as the Berlin Wall and the Cold War and not having them believe me. These artifices of simply the way things are already 30 years into the history books, and it already seems out of place and out of time. We already have many in the congregation today who were not alive when these things existed. Isn't that great? When I come to my own points of despairing that the world is ever capable of change, or find myself shaking my head at the pronouncements of war in the world today, it does me some good to remember where we have been and how quickly the seemingly impossible has happened, even in my own lifetime. The evil of today cannot last any longer than this, and shall not last beyond its brief day. This is as much an article of faith and belief as any theological statement about the person of Christ, and it

can be as hard to declare as any sinner's prayer. We do not say this because we have the power of ourselves to make the world right. We say this because its how we understand the destiny of the world to be brought into the way of the kingdom because that is the will of the God who created this beautiful, broken world. It is happening even now. It is yet to fully come to pass.

And lest we think that this is only the big stuff in our world, it is not. This is the stuff of our lives and our living too. We know that we have relationships that are out of alignment with the way of the kingdom. We know that we need to be reconciled in our lives, in our church, in our families. We know our own deep bruises that desire healing. We know that we need to be reconciled to each other. We know that sometimes we need to be reconciled to God. Even we have come to the point of saying that we believe in God and the way of the Kingdom, sometimes the hardest work we can do is to forgive God for the ways that things are mismatch the way we think they should be. This is the work we are building alongside our neighbours; the reconciled community of the Kingdom of God together. As such there is no division between our embrace of those with whom we live, those God has given us to love and to be loved by and our work as the body of Christ. It is being the body of Christ in many forms to the glory of God.

This work of reconciliation is the work of seeing the world with the eyes of Christ, the eyes of the kingdom that holds the reality of God's kingdom as the final measure that will renew all things. It is a real work that makes a real difference in how we are in the world. First, for too long we have placed limits around the different activities of reconciliation as mutually exclusive. We have broken the relationship between reconciling people to God and building relationship with God with the work of reconciling God's people in building peace, justice, and harmony. We happen to straddle the division of two denominations in the Anabaptist world who are originally divided for the precise disagreement of where to place our priorities. Evangelism is reconciling people to God and inviting them into a personal relationship with God's love. Peace building is reconciling people to the Kingdom of God, inviting them to change their personal lives in the light of God's love. One proceeds from the next, and as such are but outgrowth of same work: bringing God's kingdom into sharper clarity. It is we who place the silo around these works of the Spirit, and we would do well to acknowledge that this is not how the master has made them to be.

Secondly, as ministers of God's reconciliation, all of life is an opportunity to practice this reconciliation. This is not another thing we do because we should, or it makes us virtuous to do so. We reconcile with each other because it is God's will and Christ's way. We are disciples, and as such we follow on the best we can. That means that when conflict comes, we do not just see sides of right and wrong, but the humanity in all people, even with those with whom we passionately disagree. This is messy because this very task of discipleship conflicts with what we often think being a disciple is all about: keeping ourselves on the side of right, and hating those who God hates (which is often whomever we don't like, conveniently enough). The hardest lesson we can ever be taught is the deepest we must take to ourselves: God does not hate. God only loves. God judges, yes, but not by our standards or by our notions. And it is ONLY God who gets to do so. We are challenged always in all places to live out this reconciliation in building the REAL world in our midst.

These are not pie-in-the-sky concepts that I am speaking of here. These are principles that can be applied in every day life, no matter what your vocation is. We are called as disciples to the work of reconciliation and that work influences absolutely everything that we do, and more importantly, why we do it. It is all well and good to be kind, support justice, and walk meekly on this earth as an enlightened citizens of the world. My question to you is whether you dare take on the work of reconciliation, of bringing the world of broken relationships into harmony with the world as God would envision it explicitly because you are a follower of Christ. Dare we live for a world beyond the one that seemingly is so real, and toward the truer world of God's kingdom already, but not yet.

May we be just so crazy as to embrace this as our life, our work, and our hope come what may.