

WVPC Greeting

- Good morning.
- It is good to be back among so many familiar faces.
- For those of you who do not know me, my name is Todd Misfeldt.
- WVPC was my home church for 2 decades until pursuit of ordination took me away to an internship at another church.
- I'm now Pastor Care and Discipleship at Christ Community Church of Milpitas.

Introduction

- Today I would like to look at “reconciliation”.
- What do you think of when you hear this term?
- If you are an accountant, you may think of reconciling financial accounts. That is where you compare different accounts in a double entry accounting system and make sure that they are in agreement.
- We all reconcile our check book with the latest bank statement to make sure they agree.
- More generally, reconciliation between people is “the restoration of friendly relations.”
- This brings to mind marital or family counseling to restore peace within families.
- Many of us have experienced a breakdown in relationships.
- It can be very painful.
- I run across people all the time who have been alienated or estranged from family for years with no hope of reconciliation.
- It is very sad.
- I think that God figuratively sheds a tear at these broken relationships.
- Reconciliation can also apply to groups of people who are in opposition to one another.
- Today, I'm going to focus upon reconciliation from a personal level.
- The root cause of a broken relationship can either be our fault and/or the other person's fault or the fault of both parties.
- For reconciliation to take place, forgiveness and/or a change in behavior is needed.

Hard Hearts

- Perhaps a major hurdle for reconciliation is sometimes we do not want to forgive or to be reconciled.
- If our heart is hardened, we neither listen nor forgive.

- Having a hard heart can be insidious because rather than feeling the hurt of the broken relationship, we can get pleasure out of it.
 - We can feel superior to the other person.
 - We can get pleasure out of judging them or feel offended by them.
- Having a hard heart is not being Christ like.
- This is a sin and pushes us away from God.
 - We must constantly monitor our heart and avoid this.
- I know that I have a hard corner in my heart. With help of the Holy Spirit, I show mercy and compassion instead of holding a grudge.
- I keep this part of my heart empty.

Hard Hearts Zechariah

- This unwillingness to forgive is not new.
- We've seen this behavior in the past.
- We saw this during the time of the prophet Zechariah.
- The LORD spoke in Zechariah 7:9 and told the Israelites to "[show mercy and compassion to one another.](#)"
- The people did not want to do this. In Zechariah 7:11-12 it says

[11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears.](#)

[12 They made their hearts as hard as flint
and would not listen to the law
or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent
by his Spirit through the earlier prophets.](#)

[So the LORD Almighty was very angry. \(Zechariah 7:11–12, NIV\)](#)

- We too risk the LORD's anger when we refuse to forgive and have hardened our hearts.
- We do not want to be like these people.

Reconciliation with God

- Let's turn to the most important relationship of all – that is the relationship between God and us?
- In the past, I needed reconciliation with God.
- I had turned away from him in college and I experienced a distance from God that was my fault.

- I never want to feel that distance again.
- The Apostle Paul speaks of reconciliation in his second letter to the Corinthians.
- Let me read to you 2 Corinthians 5:15–21.
- I'm going to start at v. 15, a verse earlier than is what is printed in your bulletin.

Scripture for slide

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¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:15–21, NIV)

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Jesus Enables Our Reconciliation with God

- This passage has a number of lessons for us.
- One lesson is that our reconciliation with God is only possible through Jesus' sacrificial death for us.
- It is not something that we do through our actions or our will.
It is through Jesus that this is possible.
- A few months ago, I was speaking with someone about being baptized.
- They made a comment that there were a few things that they needed to get in order before they were baptized.
- “Nooooo” I thought.
- I told them that we don't need to be perfect to be baptized, to declare ourselves as a Christ follower.
- On our own we can't become perfect, only with Jesus can we achieve perfection in God's eyes.
- We must become new through Jesus.
- It is not what we can do

but about what Jesus has already done
and will do in us.

Live for Christ

- Paul writes that because Jesus died for all of us, we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Jesus.
- From a reconciliation perspective. This makes sense.
- We become angry/upset with another person because we have been hurt.
 - This unresolved hurt ultimately leads to our separation.
- If, as Paul says, we should no longer live for ourselves but for Christ, how then should we look at a perceived wrong against us?
 - How do offenses against us compare with our offenses against God's law.
 - They pale in comparison.
- When we follow Jesus, we admit that we are sinners and have sinned.
 - And because Jesus died for those sins and
 - paid the price for our disobedience of God's will,
 - we are forgiven.
- With that great gift, how can we not forgive others when we have been forgiven so much?
 - Only someone who is very self-centered could accept Jesus' forgiveness and not forgive others.
- If we live for Christ, past hurts against us do not matter.

Example of the Unmerciful Servant

- I'm reminded of "The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant" as told in Matthew 18:21–35.
 - As you may recall a "master" was settling his account with his servants.
 - One who owed 10,000 bags of gold couldn't repay his master, he begged for mercy and the master forgave his debt.
 - The servant left and immediately ran in to a fellow servant who owed him 100 silver coins, a much lesser sum of money.
 - Despite begging for mercy, the servant had his fellow servant thrown into prison.
 - When the master heard of this, he calls the servant 'wicked' and has him tortured and thrown into jail until he too could repay his debit.

- The wicked servant accepted reconciliation with his master but denied being reconciled with his fellow servant.
- What will our Master, God, do if we don't forgive others after Jesus has earned our forgiveness and reconciliation with God?
 - He will remember the sins that we have committed and we, like the wicked servant, must pay for our sins against God.
 - I don't like that option. I would rather forgive those who have hurt me than pay the price for my offenses against God, which I can never truly repay.

Two for Reconciliation

- For reconciliation between people to take place, a decision to forgive is required from both parties.
- We must tell the other party that we forgive them or apologize and ask their forgiveness.
- When both do this there can be reconciliation.
- However, we cannot force another person to forgive us.
- Although less satisfying, sometimes the best that we can do is to forgive the other person without receiving their forgiveness.
- A word of caution.
 - At times, there is too much physical or emotional danger, in approaching the other person seeking or giving forgiveness.
- In that case we must be satisfied with the regret for our past actions or forgiveness that we give.
- If there is any question about this, speak with Pastor Janet.

Our Decision

- Reconciliation with God only requires a decision on our part.
- God has already taken the step of offering us forgiveness by sending his One and only Son to the cross to suffer and die for our sin.
 - We need to accept God's forgiveness by following Jesus.
 - And we will be reconciled with God.
- This is our choice.

Not Fair Forgiveness

- Forgiving someone who has hurt you is hard.
- The difficulty of the task doesn't mean that it shouldn't be done.
- Offer your hurt to Jesus in prayer and he will help you forgive.

- From a worldly view, forgiveness is not fair!
- The world says that for justice to occur, the offense must be repaid.

- You have heard the phrase “²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth”. It comes from a couple of places in the Old Testament¹.
- The point of phrase is not to ensure equality, but to ensure that the person who was hurt doesn't demand more than they are due.

Jesus on Forgiveness

- Jesus quotes this phrase but adds a new perspective.
- From Matthew 5:38–39

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (Matthew 5:38–39, NIV)

- Jesus turns the phrase on its head. Jesus does not say to demand justice but to forgive.
- If we are Christians, a lack of forgiving someone else on our part should never ever be an issue in reconciliation.
- We should forgive everyone as Christ forgives us.
- We should be reconciled with everyone around us as much as possible.

Not from a Worldly Point of View

- Paul continues in v. 16:

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¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:

The old has gone, the new is here!

(slide end)

¹ Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20

- Ignore what the world tells us. Do what Jesus tells us -not fairness but forgiveness.
- We regard Jesus not as an historical figure, a mere mortal man, but as our Lord and savior.

We are a new Creation

- If Jesus is our Lord and Savior then we are a new creation.
- V. 17 says:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!

- A new creation.
- When I hear the phrase “new creation” my mind immediately jumps to Revelation 21:1a which begins:

¹Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,

- In our minds we can think that God throws out all of the old creation and starts brand new, but this is not entirely the case.
- When we received Christ, we are a new creation, but we have the same body, the same mind. We don’t grow an extra arm or change our shape.
- No, we remain much as we have been, but we have been restored to who God originally intended us to be. The old creation in us is not jettisoned but restored.
- Jesus expresses the same idea when he tells Nicodemus in John 3:7 that he must be born again. We are made over not according to the world’s standards but to God’s standards.
- This brings a whole new dimension to reconciliation with God.
- If we are reconciled to God and new creation, our thoughts, words, and deeds of forgiveness will show this.

Forest Image

- The idea of being reconciled to everyone round us is why I chose the picture of the forest on your bulletin.
 - When we are in need of reconciliation, we stand alone like a tree in a field, subject to all the fury of nature.
 - When we are reconciled with God and those around us, we are part of new forest thriving together.
 - In this forest, we are protected from the wind. Our roots feel the support of the roots of the other trees around us and strengthen us.

- We are in relationship with the other trees and with God.

Complete Reconciliation

- This needs to be a complete reconciliation.
- It is not “God let me be reconciled with you except for hatred of my former friend.
- We must be completely reconciled.

Ministry of Reconciliation

- Paul recaps in v. 18-19a:
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¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

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- It is God who makes our reconciliation with him possible through what Christ has done. This was through forgiveness of our sins.
- Paul says that God also gave 'us' the ministry of reconciliation that is to help others be reconciled with God.
- This includes Paul, Timothy who is the co-author of the letter, the Church in Corinth, and all of us!

Through Us

- Paul continues in v. 19b-20a

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

- As “Christ's ambassadors” we must be witnesses to others that they too can be reconciled with God.
- We are members of a ‘new creation’, and we speak to citizens of the ‘old creation’ who we find all around us.

Use Our Gifts

- We speak the very words of God. Just as an ambassador speaks for the country they represent; as Christians, we are God's mouthpieces and speak for God.

- In 1 Peter 4:10–11 we hear:

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

- This is great honor and responsibility.
- It is an honor to speak for God. To tell people that God's loves them and through belief in Jesus, they can become new in Christ.

We are the Righteousness of God

- Paul closes with v 20b-21:

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^{20b}We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,

so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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- Jesus' sacrifice was so that we might be reconciled to God.
- He pays the price so that offenses against our almighty creator God can be zeroed out so that our account with God balances, it is reconciled.
- Paul says that this is in order for us to be the "righteousness of God."
- For the righteous, there is nothing separating us from God.
 - Jesus has wiped away our sin,
 - We obey God's commands as given to us in Scripture,
 - We flee from sin.
 - And reach out for God to others around us.
- We are made new and become who God intended.

Conclusion

- I hope that these last few minutes have expanded the scope of what 'reconciliation' means for you.
- It applies not only to accounting and family relations but also to restoring our relationship with God.
- We must examine ourselves often:
 - Have we forgiven those who have hurt us and whose relationship with us needs reconciliation?
 - Do we need to reconcile our relationship with God?
 - Do we have a hardened heart towards God or one of his commands that needs to be brought into agreement with his will?
- If so, then pray so that through the Holy Spirit, God will show us the way to reconciliation.

- Jesus will make us a new creation!
- Concentrating upon ourselves is not all that we are called to do.
- We have a mission of reconciliation. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ and appeal to those around us to become reconciled with God.
- There is no room for an unmerciful or wicked servant.
- By following Jesus, we will also become the righteousness of God.
- That is a title that we can all aim for.

Closing Prayer

- Let us pray...
 - Dear Jesus.
 - Thank you for making amends with God for our sin.
 - We cannot do this on our own.
 - Thank you for making us a new creation in you.
 - Through which we can become the righteousness of God.
 - Let us also become your ambassadors to those around us
 - So that they too can become reconciled with God.
 - Through your sacrifice and the direction of the Holy Spirit, we will triumph.
 - Amen