

Re-Presenting Reconciliation
2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2
West Valley Presbyterian Church, August 4, 2024



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Today we are going back to our study of 2nd Corinthians. I personally have been finding Paul's letter to be very helpful, because it's all about church life in less than ideal circumstances. And guess what: every church I've ever served has been in less than ideal circumstances! Sure. Churches are made up of human beings, who aren't perfect. Yes, we believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior; and yes, we are connected to Jesus through the Holy Spirit; and yes, we do our best to love and serve God through Jesus. And, churches aren't perfect - because we aren't perfect.

Two weeks ago we talked about how we Christians are like jars of clay, with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ shining in us. And just as cracks in the jars of clay make it possible for a light inside to shine through, so also the fact that none of us Christians are perfect, makes it possible for God's light to be visible to others as it shines in and through us. That applies to us as a church the same as it applies to us as individuals. Our church isn't perfect. And, God is in our midst. Let's hear about what God is doing in our midst, shall we? Let's hear what Paul has to say about reconciliation, in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2.

SLIDES 2 – 13 (5:11-6:2)

¹¹Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹²We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And 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.

¹⁶So 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. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: ¹⁸The old has gone, the new is here! 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. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin¹⁸ for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

⁶As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ²For he says,

"In the time of my favor I heard you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you."¹⁸

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

Here ends the reading of God's holy word. Join me in saying, Thanks be to God.

Reconciliation! I love it! As you all probably know by now, I want everybody to get along. And if we're going to get along, that means reconciliation.

SLIDE 14 – 15 (v.5:18 and 5:19)

And if we think reconciliation is a good thing, then how much more does God think reconciliation is a good thing! Paul says, vv 18 and 19, "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 people's sins against them." Wow. How many people have lived in the world, past and present?

SLIDE 16 (v. 5:21)

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God gave up his own Son so that we could be reconciled to him. Think about that for a minute! Reconciliation has a cost. Reconciliation usually does mean giving up something, such as pride, or a desire to be right. For example, you may remember me mentioning the two feuding elders in one of the churches I've served. The elders were former sisters-in-law and neither of them were willing to try to reconcile. They had both suffered terrible losses due to alcoholism in the family. The son of one of the women – let's call her Woman A - had died. The son of the other woman - let's call her Woman B - had been missing for many years, and she didn't even know whether he was alive or dead. One night Woman A got a phone call from a psychiatric hospital in Honolulu, saying that her nephew – the son of Woman B – had been found on the streets and was in the hospital. Both Woman A and Woman B passionately wanted to be right. But by the grace of God, they each, in their own way, managed to give up some of that desire - so they could each reconcile with the missing son. And though they never directly reconciled with each other, their families did. When Woman A died, the family of Woman B all went to the funeral. The feud was over.

It was hard for each of those two women to give up their desire to be right, for the sake of the missing son. Yet how much harder must it have been for God to give up his Son, for the sake of setting us right with Him! But that is what he did! God gave up his Son for my sake, and your sake, and for the sake of all people in all times and places who are willing to be set right with Him! And if we are willing to come to Christ and be set right with God through him, then we are new creations. That is what it means to be reconciled to God. It means that our old lives have ended. They are gone. We no longer live for ourselves. And our new lives have begun! Now we live in Christ! Now we are a new creation! Now we are set right with him, and will be set right again, every time we stumble! Now we are reconciled to God!

That is what happened to me. I was raised Unitarian, and married another Unitarian. But we found ourselves wanting more of God than we could find among Unitarians. We wanted to join a Presbyterian church; but there was a condition: we had to be baptized, since neither of us had been. Rob was OK with that. But I struggled, because I could sense God telling me, "If you do this, your life is going to change." That was a tough choice. I liked my life and I didn't want it to change! But as I prayed, night after night, I came to realize that I wanted God more than I wanted my job as a chemist. So we agreed. We were baptized together with our children; we received communion; and it felt to me like Niagara Falls was blasting through me. By the power of the Holy Spirit, my old life was washed away. A new life began from that moment on. I was a new creation. And that's true for all of us who are in Christ. We are all new creations, whether we had a dramatic conversion or not. It doesn't matter. What matters is whether or not we are in Christ. If we are, then we are all of us new creations, whether we were baptized as babies or whether we were baptized as adults.

If there is anyone here this morning who has not yet accepted God's reconciliation, if there is anyone here this morning who has not yet accepted what God has done for you through Christ, then I join my voice together with Paul's voice in imploring you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God! Now is the time of God's favor! Now is the day of salvation! Come and talk with me after the service is over, and we'll work something out!

Now, reconciliation with God is not just a once-and-done thing. That's why we come to church, so the reconciliation God offers can be re-presented to us whenever we are here. And, reconciliation doesn't stop once we are reconciled to God. Reconciliation is not just two dimensional, between us and God – as important as that is. Reconciliation is THREE dimensional: between us, God, AND ONE ANOTHER. So let's pause for a moment. Imagine that Jesus is right here in this sanctuary, right now. (Which he is, BTW.) Now, think of someone you'd like to reconcile with. Maybe you're angry at the person, or maybe they're angry with you, or maybe you've just kind of drifted apart and it would take some effort to connect with them again. Think for a minute. // Has someone come to mind?

SLIDE 17 -18 Matthew 5:23-24

We do have to reconcile. Jesus says so. In Matthew 5:23-24, he says, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." All right; so how do we reconcile? Well, we go and do something, whether it be apologizing or

forgiving. We actively re-present reconciliation to them, just as God has done and still does re-present reconciliation for us. Being reconciled to God includes being reconciled to the people around us, so far as it depends on us.

I'm sure you remember the story Jesus told about the man with two sons, in Luke 15:11-32? One of the sons took his share of the inheritance even though his father was still alive, and went off and squandered it, and wound up totally degraded, a slave feeding slops to the pigs and wishing he could eat some of it. He comes to realize that he has to apologize for what he had done, offer to set things right by working as a hired hand, and seek forgiveness. All of which he did. The other son, who had stayed home and worked hard, now has the opportunity to forgive. But it's not clear from Jesus' story whether he will or not. Maybe he went in and joined the party and welcomed his younger brother home. Maybe he didn't. But it's clear what Jesus thinks the older brother should do. He says, in Matthew 6:14, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

SLIDE 19

God has reconciled us to himself. We have accepted that reconciliation. (Or if you haven't yet, come talk with me after church.) And now we reconcile with the people around us. As Paul says: Now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to reconcile. Let's pray.

Almighty God, thank you for the reminder that you have reconciled us to yourself through Christ. Help us to grow into that reconciliation, and give you thanks. Remind us of the people to whom we need to apologize, and remind us also of the people whom we need to forgive. Help us to speak and to listen to one another. May we re-present reconciliation to one another, even as you have reconciled us to yourself. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

