**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21**  For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**“Bridging The Gap”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. God created life to be complimentary, hospitable, and whole. Lent shows us a world shattered and pulled apart by sin. If God had not spoken His promise of a Savior, where would our first parents have ended up? This reconciling love at the Garden is in the parable Jesus tells today. He makes us fall off on one side of the horse or the other to deal with selfishness or resentment. Yet, the reliable and generous actor for all good is the father. He runs with love to a son crushed by the weight of his foolishness. He goes out to the other who was unwilling to budge saying, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

There are plenty of reasons for reconciling in life. Struggling marriages find motivation to stay together for the sake of the kids. Politics seek ways to agree on elected candidates to avoid fracturing a party. Soldiers on the “other side” of wars past might now be fighting together against a greater enemy today. When St. Paul wrote again to the Corinthians, it was for the sake of reconciliation. There were many unresolved issues such as his authority as an apostle, the collection needed for the Christians in Jerusalem, the call to embrace again a repentant member, the desire to quiet infighting among their church, and even to clarify when he hoped to visit. Rather than being overwhelmed or rule by force, St. Paul tells us today a better foundation. The Father in heaven reconciles us in His Son so that now we are ambassadors of reconciliation.

Reconciliation means God gives a different perspective for a conflicted world. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” The Corinthian Christians were to understand that the worldly point of view was fleshly. Sinners apart from Christ had a corrupt perspective of both God and man. In terms of life today, this translates into seeing people as competitors who are either helpful to our success or who need to get out of the way. The same applies to Christ where his teachings on morality mean more than the perfect death and life He gives up on the cross for all the sins of the world.

As St. Paul once viewed Christians as a threat and saw Christ only as an offence, God by His grace gave him a new perspective. This miracle to see things differently is what has come to us in the same way by baptism. Yet, this new creation given by God’s grace does not mean we lose perspective. In other words, we are prone to fall back into the ways of the flesh. It can happen with slogans for progress or worldly principles that end up putting God’s Word under our feet. This is no less foolish than the son ditching His father for a self-made glory. Likewise, we can figure good people are good with God regardless of creed or religion. This is no less blind than the older son who figured his labor earned the respect of His father. As new creations of God’ grace, we see by the new light of baptism. Reconciling life today need not lose perspective of God’s love for a world conflicted by sin.

Reconciliation means no one else bridges the gap other than God for us. St. Paul goes on saying, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” The Corinthian Christians were to remember who has taken the initiative. Before facing the problems, divisions, and strife in life is to see the eternal wrath of God that stood against us. Only in Christ have we been forgiven, redeemed, protected, and reconciled. God’s justice poured out upon His Son has filled in the gap of sin and death. In life, it takes two sides willing to reconcile their differences. In Christ, there is only one side God’s will to save sinners.

Since Christ actively fulfilled the Law’s demands and passively suffered for the guilt of every sin, God is no longer against anyone. There is a change in relationship not with man, but with God. The Father has put forward a bias peace treaty by the sacrifice of His Son. It restores a right relationship even with His enemies. This universal atonement is for all, but the benefit comes to me only by faith in what God has promised. Yet, whether or not a person believes changes nothing in what Christ did. His sacrifice has sufficiently reconciled to God the whole world. God has done it all. To reject and deny such love by the Father is either foolish or to still hold a grudge. This is akin to putting up a fight when there is nothing left to fight over. The message and ministry of reconciliation is now how God bestows His love by Word and Sacrament. Christ bridges the gap so none need be apart from His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Reconciliation means God works through us now toward others. “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” For the Corinthians to challenge Paul was to challenge Christ, since Christ had come to them through the mission efforts of this apostle. Paul is appealing to them, or the Greek strongly puts it “begging them,” not to lose the reconciling love of Christ that made them what they are. Rather than by manmade righteousness, worldly glory or some other standard, God had already given them what they need in His Son. More than being an offering for sin, Jesus became sin so all righteousness is alone by faith in Him.

As there are representatives who speak on behalf of our country, Christ now does His reconciling work to the world through each of our lives. God by His baptized ambassadors is making an appeal wherever and to whomever you meet. In a world where so many false perceptions of God and man have no hope of reconciliation, the Gospel alone has power to speak and act. President Harrison wrote to all pastors in the LCMS last week about the political upset taking place. He pointed out this fact regardless the outcome stating,

“I may have a political view that there should be a wall on the border. But that doesn’t change one iota of Christ’s mandate to care for the illegal/undocumented neighbor who might well be living or working next to me…I might have strong views on Muslim immigration, but that dare not make me unwilling and unable to see that these people are in my community already, and they need Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is not the way of selfish sinners or prideful Pharisees, but the love of the Father for all.

If we need reconciling today, there is a lot of work to do person-to-person and between whole groups. However, it will never be as glorious as the better work of God’s grace. The Father in heaven reconciles us in His Son so that now we are ambassadors of reconciliation. This kingdom of Christ comes during Lent for a conflicted world like ours. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://blogs.lcms.org/2016/president-harrison-provides-a-lutheran-view-of-church-and-state [↑](#footnote-ref-1)