

## Reconciliation

In our epistle lesson Paul informs us that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is “The reestablishment of friendly relations; (theology) The end of estrangement between a human and God as a result of the process of atonement; OR (accounting) Process of matching and comparing figures from accounting records against those presented on a bank statement.”

I like the parallelism between those last two. Theology and accounting! But you see it: a debt was owed, a debt was paid in Christ, and guess what? You’re square. You’re good. And we might think, “No one is good but God alone!” Indeed! And in Jesus, God’s goodness, his righteousness, is now yours. He became your sin, notice how strong that language is, more than just carrying it, he was it, that he might rightly be judged for it, that you might become, not just carry, but become his good - his righteousness. And therefore an heir of eternal life.

We then, the Church, those who are in Christ and are no longer just flesh – just slime, just gas bags, just molecules. We who are new creations - made new in Jesus - made righteous in Jesus, by His work, not ours - we now have been given this ministry – to reconcile as he did us. Not counting trespasses – but forgiving them that there might be renewed relationships and healing.

Sounds great doesn’t it?

And it is.

What does it look like?

We have a great example in the parable of the prodigal son. Now, we were talking about “headings” of scripture sections on Wednesday and how the editor’s headings - those bold lines

in your bible, which aren't in the original Greek and Hebrew – we were talking about how they aren't always a perfect encapsulation of the text and this remains true here. The parable of the prodigal son, starts with “there was a man who had a son who became a prodigal”? No, it begins with “There was a man who had two sons.”

In the first son, the one we know so well, the one we confess we have been at times, in him we see a beautiful picture of reconciliation! After being in a gentile land amongst spiritually unclean animals, he “came to himself.” He stops being led by greed and lust and hatred of his father, and he repents, he turns back. Turning back to his father he apologizes and the father does not count his trespasses against him! The father does not say, “Work for me until you pay back what you took and then you can be my son.” No he runs to him, gives him a robe (a robe of God's righteousness?), he gives him the family signet ring – “You are not a servant, you are restored as a Son!” All square. This is reconciliation! There is repentance, apology, forgiveness and then a party!

How wonderful.

May we be a people who, when there is repentance and apology, we forgive. May we be a people when there is a wrong we've done - that we been convicted by God's word of – may we be a people who turn in repentance, apologize, and rejoice when forgiveness is offered. And if forgiveness is not offered, because we can't control others, may we in patience and continuing to trust in God who judges rightly (this is the beauty of the absolution) trust that the wrong we've done has been forgiven by God in Jesus, who again, became sin for us, that we might receive his reconciling goodness – “all square.”

But there are two sons in this parable. And at the end of the parable is the relationship with the older son reconciled? Is it friendly? Is it all square?

No it isn't.

At the end of the parable we are left with beautiful promises from the father. He never cheated the older brother, and that everything he has is his! Everything! Oh, this is a beautiful verse- we go around complaining and whining and the Father says "all I have, my whole kingdom, is yours, ask, rejoice, see my Son I have given you!..." You See the father's heart, as he entrates his older son, you see his longing for reconciliation, "Son, don't do this..."

But notice the father doesn't apologize for doing what is right with the younger son. He affirms his action, "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad..."

Can this be a model for the ministry of reconciliation? That where we've been wrong, even if we were only responsible for 10% of the fight, well, for that 10% can we be the prodigal, who repents, and apologizes? And when that person is still at odds, can we be like the father? To not shirk the truth, but speak promises of good-will? "I am not your enemy, and I don't want to fight you." I think this is model the Bible puts forward.

We don't see the reaction of the older brother after that. Is he still outside – not a good place to be in Jesus' parables – is he still jealous and angry?

The lectionary committee did us a favor by putting in verses 1-3 of Chapter 15 to set the scene. Jesus tells these parables to the pharisees.

And so Jesus the greatest reconciler, the reconciler of the world, is he reconciled with those pharisees who are grumbling? No. At least not all of them. They are the older brother, and the

parable is left open for a reason. “That’s you, pharisees, will you remain outside with your pride, or come celebrate?”

And as they grumble and think they are better than the “sinners,” does Jesus throw the pharisees a party and slaughter the fattened calf and give them a signet ring? No, how could he? *They* would not. They would not attend if invited. They, like the older son, prefer the outside, they prefer their pride, and they don’t apologize for anything or repent because it’s everyone else who is wrong, not them, they aren’t the “sinners”! (Do we ever think this way?)

And so Jesus in his ministry speaks truth to them, he tells them what is good and right, and I daresay even reminds them of the promises of good-will, especially early on, of the prophecies, of Moses who “if they heard him would believe in Jesus.”

Paul does this same thing, He has many truths to tell the Corinthians, even harsh ones. But he still proclaims a ministry of reconciliation and the goodwill he has for them, as God does in Jesus.

May we be a people of the truth. May we let it convict us when we are wrong, forgive and apologize. May we be a people who take up the mantle of reconciliation so when that person does apologize to you, it may not mean you have to be best friends, but can we forgive? Can we let loose the judgment and hatred and anger? Can we move toward healing and celebration?

Easier said than done, I know. But that shouldn’t surprise us. Easy for Paul to say Jesus reconciled us to God. It was harder to carry out, wasn’t it? It was *painful* to carry out. Nails, blood, lies, spit, tears, wrath, and death. Those aren’t easy things. But Jesus endured them, becoming sin for us, that we might be forgiven, all square, good.

That we might have a spot in the celebration feast where we are clothed in his robe, welcomed as his children, and there is a feast of rich food and wine well-refined. We get a foretaste of that here, can we come here as people reconciled, who long for the good of the other, who stand for the truth of God's word, even here, even with our sinful natures pulling at us – can we be reconciled at this table? In joyous expectation of the table that awaits in God's kingdom?

This has been given to us: The ministry of reconciliation. This has been given to us: actual reconciliation before the Father. The Father who has promises of Good Will for you. "You are always with me, and all I have is yours!" Beautiful promises. All he has! His Son, His Kingdom, life everlasting! He gives freely. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.