

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *From the River to the Mountain*

Service Theme: *Committed to a Lofty Charge*

Sermon Theme: *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*

January 21, 2024—2 Corinthians 5:14-21

It started as a normal day, like so many others that had come before it. Another day spent performing the tasks of their trade—prepping their equipment, readying their boats, getting out on the water, casting their nets, God-willing catching some fish, transporting their catch to the market, and then washing, mending, and hanging up their nets to dry for the next day. It was good, honest work; the family business; an occupation that would put food on the table with some skill and a little luck. But on that seemingly normal day, everything changed.

As the brothers Simon and Andrew cast their nets into the Sea of Galilee, while their business partners, James and John prepared their nets, Jesus came by and called to the two sets of brothers, “***Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.***” And immediately, without hesitation, they left behind their boats, their nets, their father, their family business, their way of life-- to follow Jesus and carry out his lofty charge. Jesus had something better and more important for them to do! No longer fishermen. Now, they would be “fishers of men!”

Can you even imagine? If Jesus showed up at your office, or in your classroom tomorrow and invited you, “Come, follow me!” could you willingly, immediately leave it all behind to follow Jesus’ call? How difficult would that be!

But here’s the thing! Jesus already has called you! Not only to be his follower, but also to be “follower-makers.” While the Apostle Paul uses different imagery in his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, his point is the same. Jesus has also called you to carry out the most important work! To be **Ambassadors of Reconciliation**. What exactly does that mean? Let’s break it down word by word, starting with “reconciliation.”

Paul writes, “***All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.***”

“Reconciliation” or “reconcile” has a few different definitions. So which you think of probably depends on your life experience. If you’ve got a background in accounting or business, you probably think of reconciling as lining up financial accounts next to each other to check them for accuracy. If you’re a student of history or have a military background, you might think of reconciliation as the actions countries take to re-establish peace and harmony after a war or conflict. Or, in a similar vein, if you’ve experienced broken relationships in your personal life, you might see reconciling as what needs to happen to change someone’s status from enmity back to friendship. So which of those is Paul talking about when he mentions God calling us to carry out the “ministry of reconciliation?” Well... yes. Because in a way, all those definitions apply.

The ministry of reconciliation is all about what God has done to reconcile the sinful world to himself. Paul explains, “***God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.***” For some, that sounds too easy. Is God like your winking grandpa? When you do something bad, he tells you, “Don’t worry about it! Have some ice cream!”?

Does God reconcile the world to himself by simply telling us, “Don’t worry about it!” regarding our sins against him, and turning a blind eye toward our sins against others?

That might sound good, because it lets us off the hook. But it’s not possible! You can’t have reconciliation if there isn’t an acknowledgment or confession of wrongdoing that necessitates the reconciling! It especially doesn’t seem right when you’re the one who’s been sinned against! Would you be content if God turned a blind eye to someone robbing your house, destroying your reputation, or killing your child in a drunk-driving accident? Wouldn’t you insist on justice? Absolutely! And so does God.

Paul explains how God reconciles us to himself, and why God doesn’t count people’s sins against them. “***God made him who had no sin to***

be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God didn’t leave the world’s sin unpunished. Justice was carried out! But at the same time, God displays unfathomable grace. God accomplishes this through the great exchange Paul describes here.

To have a perfect relationship with the holy God, we also need to be holy; morally perfect; without sin, and with righteousness—that is, perfect obedience to God’s law. That’s what God should see when he looks at us. However, when God looks at us--and every person-- he sees a complete lack of holiness, and lives plentiful with sin. Because of that sin and lack of holiness, we have a broken relationship with the holy God, and all mankind was eternally condemned, doomed to eternal separation from God in Hell. That’s why Paul writes that God had to reconcile “the world” to himself!

But instead of excusing or turning a blind eye to our lack of holiness, God reconciles the world to himself by enacting justice. He sends his only Son, born as a true human being, Jesus Christ. Because Jesus lived a perfect life of righteousness to God’s law, he’s the only human God could look at and see the holiness, righteousness, and lack of sin he requires. So God made a great exchange...at the cross! Jesus willingly takes the sin of the world on himself and bears the punishment for it--suffering hell as he’s separated from his Father—on that cross. ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.”*** And in return, Jesus’ righteousness is given as a gracious gift to the whole world that lacks it. So that through faith in Jesus, ***“in him we might become the righteousness of God,”*** having all that we need to be perfectly reconciled to God!

Just like business reconciliation, God has taken our account and placed it next to Jesus’ account. But because God reconciled the world to himself through Jesus, his account has become our account, so that side by side, those accounts are reconciled in God’s eyes! Just like with broken diplomacy between governments, or broken relationship among family, God has done everything required to produce reconciliation—to change our status with God from enmity to family! Which is really incredible when you think about it. Because in every

other situation of reconciliation, it’s always the party who caused the conflict that needs to make restitution for their harmful actions before reconciliation can be achieved? Germany needed to pay and acknowledge their wrongs to be reconciled to the Allies after World War II, not the reverse.

But in the great exchange, God is the one who pays the ultimate price to reconcile the offending world to himself! As Paul writes, ***“We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died from them and was raised again.”***

That’s the ***“message of reconciliation that God has committed to us.”*** It’s all about focusing on what God has done to reconcile the world to himself—including us! That reconciliation isn’t just the heart and core of the ministry God has called us to carry out, it’s the heart and core of our entire lives and eternity! So first, we need to apply that truth to ourselves. The ministry of reconciliation isn’t just what God has called us to, but what he’s done for us!

And as we apply that truth of reconciliation to ourselves, it also motivates us to carry out the ministry of reconciliation God has called us to! ***“For Christ’s love compels us.”*** It’s not fear of punishment or retribution. It’s the love of Christ that motivates and drives us to be committed to the lofty charge God has called us to.

As Paul writes, ***“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”*** Just like Jesus called the fishermen to be his fishers of men, so Jesus has called us to be his ambassadors. That’s a powerful image when you think about it.

Because an ambassador’s job is to speak on behalf of someone they represent. But it’s not who they are that gives their message power and impact—it’s who they speak for! John Q. Smith, US Ambassador to X foreign country doesn’t hold authority over foreign powers because he’s John Q. Smith. He holds that power, authority, and pull because he’s the ambassador who speaks for the President, government, and military of the United States! His warnings strike fear in the hearts of

foreign leaders, and his reassurances and promises give comfort to foreign nations because he speaks on behalf of one who truly does have power and authority!

So, while you might tell yourself, “I’m not cut out to be a messenger for God,” it’s not about you! The power of the message of reconciliation God has called us to proclaim isn’t how eloquent you are, or how well you can elucidate the mysteries of the Scriptures. The power comes from the one for whom we speak, and whose power is in those words we proclaim! You too are an ambassador of reconciliation, because it’s not about you. It’s about the one who has called you to be an ambassador!

With that in mind, there are other layers to the imagery of the ambassador. The ambassador doesn’t proclaim his own personal feelings and opinions. He speaks the messages that have been relayed to him by the United States! Likewise, as ambassadors for Christ, we don’t speak our own opinions, feelings, or our own personal truths. We share the truth of reconciliation that God himself has given us in his Word.

And the Ambassador is called on to speak not just to the people they like, or feel like will be the most receptive to their message. They’re called on to speak to all people the United States tells them to speak to! Like we said a few weeks ago on Epiphany, the message of reconciliation is for all people—and all means all! As Paul writes, ***“From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”*** Literally, he says, we don’t view anyone ***“according to the flesh.”*** As ambassadors of reconciliation, we’re called on to proclaim the Gospel to all people—not even paying attention to their social, political, financial, educational, or physical circumstances. Instead, we look at every single person as a blood-bought soul, who needs to know the truth that they have been reconciled to God through Christ!

By calling us to be his ambassadors, God has given a purpose to our lives that no other purpose comes close to! Because by calling us to be ambassadors of reconciliation, God has given eternal purpose and impact to our lives! Someday, when you get to Heaven—because God

has reconciled you to himself in Christ—I guarantee no one’s going to tell you, “I’m here because you were such a great plumber,” Or because “you were such a smart student,” or because “you were a fantastic athlete.” But if we act as Christ’s ambassadors, sharing the Gospel of reconciliation with every soul we meet, you might get to hear someone say, “I’m here because you shared Jesus with me,” or “because you invited me to church,” or “because you shared the Gospel with my great-great-grandpa, and it got passed down to every generation after! Think of that! By calling you to be an ambassador of reconciliation, God has given your life eternal purpose! And because he’s reconciled you to himself through that same message, he’s give you eternal life!

You know how the old saying goes. ***“If you give a man a fish, he’ll eat for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he’ll eat for a lifetime.”*** I’d like to add one more stanza to the saying. And if God calls us to “fish for people,” then people will live eternally. So, compelled by Christ’s love, let’s follow the lead of those four brothers and willingly drop every other priority, in order to ***“live for him who died for us and was raised again.”*** To be Ambassadors of Reconciliation.