

The Power of Reconciliation

Isaiah 59:1-8; II Corinthians 5:16-20

March 31, 2019

Our reading for today begins with “From now on, therefore...” which indicates that something has occurred before that expects we will need to do something differently as we go forward. It is important to look back just a bit to help this reading make more sense. Apparently, Paul previously wrote what is known as his “Letter of Tears” to the church in Corinth, because he has been hurt by some words or behavior that happened earlier. Paul is a normal type of person who wants to be appreciated, and he may have been upset for not having been recognized for having worked so hard or preached so diligently for the church in Corinth. But he begins to show his shift of thinking with this key verse in Chapter 3: “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

So now, hear this Word from the Lord: ***II Corinthians 5:16-20.***

Reconciliation is a very powerful word. It actually has the ability to help us when we have felt broken, it has the ability to show us in times of stress, or crisis, or confusion, or pain, that a new learning or some enhanced clarity to help us feel whole again might be just around the corner. When we remember the value of feeling supported by one another we receive that extension of God’s grace. We long for that connection not just because it feels good to us, but because God has commissioned us to be those ambassadors of God’s peace and reconciliation.

I remember a story told by Joanna Adams. She recounted how after Jesus had lived, taught, and ministered on earth - that after he was crucified and returned to heaven, all the angels gathered around him to ask what life on earth was like, and how had he instructed the people to carry on his message. Jesus said: “I left my message in their hands.” The angels replied: “What, you left your message in the peoples’ hands; they can’t handle that responsibility! What were you thinking?!”

Jesus replied: “I have no other plan. I believe that if they let the power of God work through them, they will be able to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.”

If we can believe this text: “A new creation really means a new creation...” then we can begin to live into that new awareness. Think about it... There are people or communities, who in front of our very eyes, have dramatically changed. We know people who have left behind lives of addiction, or hatred, or exclusion. Think of the times you have felt at least some partial redemption, of knowing that through the support of your faith community, you have received a new sense of wholeness. For our sake, Christ died and was raised, so that in Christ, we might become the righteousness of God. (5:21). Here’s an even more radical thing than new creation - not just knowing about it, hearing about, talking about, or considering it reluctantly, but actually becoming the righteousness of God! It takes a new creation to become people and communities whose reach outside of ourselves begins to match the reach of the love of God. Let us so live this prayer today.

I read an interview recently that Gregory Jones, who is with the Leadership Institute at Duke Divinity School, conducted with Gregory Boyles. Boyles is the founder of Homeboys Industries, a school in East Los Angeles to help young men leave the destructive culture of gangs and get a new start in life. That is no easy task. Boyles is openly critical of media coverage that says these young men join gangs just because they want a place to belong. He believes they join gangs because they want to die. They have come through life feeling so abused, so neglected, so isolated that the pain is so extreme that they really want to be released from this life of darkness and sadness.

Boyles remembers: “It used to be that I would think my job was about saving lives. But now I think saving lives is for the Coast Guard. Our choice is always the same: save the world or savor it. And I vote for savoring it. Just because everything is about something else, if you savor the world, somehow - go figure - it’s getting saved.”

When we learn to love as God loves, when we relish the relationships God longs to develop with us, and see the extent to which Jesus reached out to all he met, can we identify anyone who does not belong to us? Is there anyone Christ would leave out? God calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation, emissaries of peace and justice, participants with God in reaching out to put our arms around every last person in this world until we are all one through him who loves us with an everlasting love.