



SERMONS

Our United State Our Diplomacy

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

October 25, 2020

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Good morning! It's great to be with you today. I'm Pastor Julie and we are in a sermon series called Our United State. In a time in which it is easy to feel divided even in the church, we are looking at how Paul's second letter to the Corinthians highlights what unites us together as followers of Jesus. And our passage today is like a rallying point, Paul calling the people of God to be on mission with Christ. Last week, Pastor Rachel told us that ultimately, we are citizens of heaven, that this world is not our home. Our passage today shows us that while we are away from our eternal home, we have been entrusted with a great diplomatic mission of being ambassadors of God.

If you would turn to 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. As you turn to it in your bibles or look it up on your phone, on this Sunday, as we honor our reformed Presbyterian heritage, it is important to note how precious it is to have scripture right here at our fingertips, in our back pocket all of the time. Part of what the Reformers fought for, even died for was that we might have God's special revelation in our hands in our own language. We should never take that for granted.

Hear the word of the Lord:

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.

This is the word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

I wonder if any of you have ever been in a situation in which you needed an ambassador. 14 years ago, Joey and I were backpacking from Baku, Azerbaijan to Istanbul, Turkey... as one does. And on our second day of travel we hit a bit of a road block. About 50 miles out of Baku, the mini bus we were on broke down. We quickly realized how helpless of a situation we were in when it became evident that none of the other passengers spoke a lick of English...like didn't even understand the word "Hello." And after about an hour of waiting, we watched as the other passengers began walking. Knowing that the next bus depot was another 50 miles away, we did something that seemed very logical at the time... Now that I am parent, it makes me cringe, we (stick out thumb). The third car to blaze by slammed on their breaks, threw it in reverse and motioned for us to jump in....And we did. The rest of the story will have to wait for another time but it included a soda pop drinking bear, toasting to the mountains of Azerbaijan with a Russian named Tafiq... we're not entirely sure, but we might have purchased property in Ismali? and eventually, we were dropped off at our final destination some four hours past the bus depot. When Khalid and Hameed dropped us off at the hotel, we were able to thank them through a translator, to which they responded, "It was our delight." Joey and I have reflected on that day often. Our first comment is usually something about being glad we didn't get murdered. But a close second was the sheer joy it was to experience Azerbaijan with these two men as our ambassadors.

As we wade into the text, I hope that you will find a similar delight in the diplomatic mission that God has called you to as we explore why God entrusted this ministry to us and what it looks like to be an ambassador of reconciliation.

When we read about this call to be ambassadors, our initial response might be, "Who me?" Why did God entrust this ministry to us? There must be someone more qualified. But the reason we have been entrusted with this ministry of reconciliation is because we have experienced it ourselves. They say that the greatest salesperson is a



satisfied customer. *I remember one time I was walking through a certain downtown Seattle department store and a shoe salesperson noticed the sole of my shoe was coming undone. They stopped me and said, "We can fix that for you." I said, "I didn't even buy them here." And they didn't just fix them, they replaced them...for free. And that is why I will shop at a certain Swedish department store for life.* The best salesperson is a satisfied customer. The greatest ambassador of Christ is a someone who has experienced the work of Christ in their life. The greatest ambassador of Christ is a justified sinner.

We have been entrusted with this message because we know what it's like to be reconciled to God. Five times in the passage Paul uses a form of that word reconcile. Five times, we are reminded that we were reconciled to God. It almost begins to sound redundant. But when we consider what it means for us to be reconciled to God, it becomes the type of thing that we should repeat over and over again. God, through Christ reconciled us to himself.

I know that some of you have heard this a hundred, maybe a thousand times, maybe you are hearing it for the first time, but I want you to really let this sink into your soul. Here we were estranged from God because of our sin...And what did God do? He drew near to us in the person of Jesus and acted as our mediator. Vs. 21 says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." That is the gospel right there. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." I want you to picture this with me, on the cross the relationship between Christ and sin was so close that Paul says he who knew no sin was made sin, and more than that, his righteousness was given to us.

When we put our faith in JesusWe become the righteousness of God. This is why Paul is able to say that when we are reconciled through Christ our trespasses aren't counted against us. When God looks at us, he doesn't see a long list of sins, he sees the righteousness of Christ. Commentators call this the great exchange, that our sin was imputed, attached to Jesus, and his righteousness was attached to us. Martin Luther wrote, "Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him, and say, 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and given me what is yours. You became what you were not, so that I



might become what I was not." I love that phrase, learn to sing him. He became what he is not so that I might become what I was not. We should continually be awestruck and humbled by this work of reconciliation.

We are the ambassadors for Christ is because our lives have been completely altered by Christ. Our faith in Jesus ought to make it obvious that we are changed, reconciled. Vs. 17 says "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone the new has come." This is one of those moments when our English translations do not do the text justice. It would better read, "If anyone is in Christ, NEW CREATION!" It reminds me of the chef Emeril, whenever he would add something that would spice up a dish, he'd yell "Bam!" In Christ? BAM! New Creation! And this isn't something old being formed anew, this is completely new. You're heard stories like this before. Maybe you even have a story like this. I became a Christian and it was like I was a new person. BAM! New Creation.

So here we are, new creations, we have become the righteousness of God, we are reconciled to God through Christ... Shouldn't that motivate us to tell people about this reconciliation? Don't you want to tell people about what God has done in your life?

But what does it look like to live out this commission? Is there a job description with some bullet pointed responsibilities? How do we take up this role of ambassadors? I'm guessing most of us live between covert or overt. Some of us treat this ambassador role like an undercover mission, so entrenched in the world that no one would even know we are Christians. And some of us, well, some of us take a different approach like this...Ok, Paul might have implored people to be reconciled to God, I'm imploring you, please don't do that.

This is not a covert operation, and it takes a bit of tact too. I think that Paul was very intentional with his choice of the words to describe this ministry we have been called to do. Because an ambassador primarily does two things: delivers a message on behalf of a foreign power and represents that foreign power. An ambassador does not speak for themselves; their words are the words of the one they represent. As ambassadors for Christ our message is the same message that has been applied in our own lives, "Be reconciled to God." The language here has a sense of urgency



befitting this important message. One of the things we won't be able to do when we enter into the heavenly citizenship is evangelize. We should always have that message of reconciliation on our lips, always be prepared to give a reason for the hope we have in Jesus. We should always be looking for a moment to share in a loving way this great message of peace. If you need a little tip on where to start, start with your story of who God has reconciled you through Jesus.

And an ambassador represents a foreign power. This is where our diplomacy really comes into play. You see, it's not just our words that implore people to be reconciled to God, it's the way we live our life too. For an ambassador, a cultural gaffe or foot in the mouth could have international consequences. Instead, Ambassadors work hard to be tactful and respectful. They strive show what it is like to be a citizen of their country, with all that countries benefits. They are keenly aware of how their actions represent the foreign power that sent them.

When Joey and I lived in Afghanistan, we were always aware that people were watching what we did, how we acted, dressed, spoke. And we knew that even though it wasn't part of our job, we represented the United States. We couldn't stop being American, and so our actions reflected what it meant to be American. As Christians, every action reflects on our status as citizens of heaven. Do your actions reflect your heavenly citizenship?

I want you to think about how you interact with the world around you through the lens of a diplomat representing God's work of reconciliation. Are you imploring people to be reconciled to God? Are you speaking words that reflect this message that has been entrusted to us? When you have a friend over for coffee, how is your conversation reflecting Christ's reconciliation? When you post something on social media....are you being diplomatic and showing the love of Christ? Seriously, before you post on Facebook, before you share that article, or comment on a thread, think about your ministry of reconciliation. Are you acting like a kingdom citizen in the way you spend your time, or your money? How are your actions reflecting that you have been made the righteousness of God?

You are God's ambassador, reconciled to God through Jesus, sent out into the world every single day as God's appeal. Live like an ambassador! Speak like an



ambassador! Let this ministry that has been entrusted to you, this message, be known to all so that all may be reconciled to Christ.

Let's pray.

On St Andrews Sunday, we recognize the long legacy of believers who have gone before us to that heavenly kingdom. Each of the names on this list was an ambassador for Jesus, each of these names shows what it looks like to be reconciled to God. Paul Jackson was an ambassador, showing people what it looked like to gather in community. Tan Jenkins was on a mission to show reconciliation in how she served families. Alan Stubblefield was diplomatic in how he listened to people explore faith at Alpha. I look at this list and see people who helped me be reconciled to God... Wilma Conan with her dedication, Bill Thorton with his service, my mom with her commitment to prayer. As these names scroll by, I want you to reflect on this legacy of saints who have gone before us. When the name of someone you know and love scrolls by, the name of someone who was an ambassador of reconciliation for you, I invite you to stand and honor their witness. Let us now remember those who have gone before us.