

“Connected in Reconciliation”

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

September 24, 2017

Last week we looked at the Connected in Glory, how the Lord has joined us to himself by faith and now his life, resurrection life, is within us. He in us is our glory, our weight, seen in us even when the earthen vessels, jars of clay, of our lives begins to crack.

Today, Paul begins to put it to work to show us why we have this life in us. What use is it? The Christian life is not simply my and my...my sins forgiven so I go to heaven when I die. It is so much more. It is about a new creation that begins in us and will one transform the entire creation. We are connected to serve the world. There is a wideness in God's mercy, and we have the joy of being a part of his grand plan for the world. How might you fit?

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ 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.

I'm not a gardener or plant expert. But I do know about the crocus. There are lots of different sorts of crocus, but one of the most common things to know about them is that they bloom in late winter or the earliest of spring. Often they can be among the first flowers to bloom, even appearing under a blanket of snow.

They are hearty flowers, being given by the Lord a special waxy coating on them that enables them to grow and thrive in an environment of death and decay of winter. When everything else looks brown, dead, void of life, you may see a crocus pop up, and it is the promise of new life to come.

The crocus is a kind of harbinger, an early herald that death has met its end and new life has begun, promising shortly, new life will cover this same ground that appears so lifeless today...except for this lonely bloom.

Paul in our text speaks of a new life that shows up amidst death and promises fuller new life to come. That truth is reconciliation; we are through the Lord Jesus reconciled to God and are sent as reconcilers into this world of death. The word “reconciliation” points to the re-establishment of a broken relationship, or replacing hostility with friendship. In the everyday use of the word Paul uses here, it often pointed to an exchange of one thing for another. Simply put, God has exchanged war for peace, anger for love, enmity for friendship. We have been reconciled to God.

The gospel taking up residence in our lives changes us and then the Lord uses his people, his body, as changed changers, horizontally, as reconciled reconcilers, as transformed transformers, healed healers in this world that is dead and decaying because of sin.

New life in Christ has been birthed, sprung up in God's people and through God's people into the world. There is a transformation that has begun in you, in us. How do we see it?

1. Reconciled to God

This text is one of the classic and clear succinct statements of what God has done for us. Paul uses some stark terms with which we all are familiar to draw us into what God has done. We here it in v. 14, v. 18, and v. 21.

14, one has died for all, therefor all have died. And in 18, All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and v. 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.

Paul is linking together some critical ideas: the idea of union, being joined to Jesus and the result, reconciliation. We may have expected v. 14 to say that, one had died, therefore others live. But that's not the idea here. Instead, Paul points us to our union with Jesus; we have been joined to him in his death. Because Jesus died, all his people died, all seeming to mean all kinds of people—not merely Jews, but all kinds of people, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

What does that mean? It means that when Jesus was nailed to the cross as an act of God's judgment on sin, I was nailed there with him. When God's wrath and judgment was poured out on sin on Jesus, it was for your judgment and sin that it was poured out on Jesus. This is more than "Jesus bore what I deserve," which is true. But specifically what Paul is saying is that when Jesus was hung upon the cross, he was covered up with my sin and your death and our shame. WE were joined to him on that cross, crucified with Christ.

He gets more specific with the "how" of reconciliation in v. 21. Let's take the first clause of the verse, *for our sake, he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who (Jesus) knew no sin*. Paul is NOT saying Jesus became a sinner when on the cross. Rather, he identifies Jesus the Lamb of God as the sacrifice for sin as the one to whom our sin has been credited, or imputed. Our sin was given for Jesus to bear on the cross in our place.

On Good Friday, Jesus was nailed to that cross and the skies went dark. Every lie and falsehood told, every truth stretched, every lustful look, each and every hateful thought, every ounce of my pride nailed to the cross in His body in order to judge it, condemn it—condemn and damn all MY sin in HIS body. He entered into our world that by joining our lives to his, we might be judged—put to death for our sin—in him. We don't have to hide our fear, our guilt, our shame, because it, I, was nailed to the cross in Jesus.

The second clause of v. 21 continues, *so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God*. Just as we are joined to Jesus in his death, we also are joined to Jesus in his life of obedience. This is so critical for us to grasp if we are to live with confidence in this life. Jesus's spotless life of perfection, his complete and unwavering obedience to everything God expects of a human being was credited to us, imputed to us, given to us as if we had done it, as we are joined to him by faith.

Because Jesus's righteousness is given to us, we don't have to try and prove ourselves worthy of God. We do not have to strive to gain God's love or his delight. The Lord is not looking and waiting for us to fill the list of requirements in order to have a relationship of love and life with us...because Jesus has already fulfilled it all and then credited it to us as if we had done it ourselves!

It is that union with Jesus in his life and in his death that bring reconciliation, the exchange of warfare and anger with God for peace and love. God's case against us, his grievance against us is dropped and satisfied because Jesus stood in our place.

Yet if we aren't careful, we will miss the astonishing truth about this reconciliation. V 18 says, all this is from God, v. 19, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting our trespasses against us. Think about this with me for a moment. Most of the time when we think about reconciliation, it is the offender to pursue reconciliation. I've hurt you in how I treated you, so I try to reconcile, to make it up. If you hurt your spouse, maybe you apologize and get flowers or something. The offender pursues to reconcile.

Or to make it graphic, in warfare, who pursues reconciliation? Most of the time it is the loser, right? The side losing will raise the white flag of surrender and seek a truce. We can't fight anymore because we've lost too many soldiers, lost our position, or something. The losing side, the defeated side, sends up the flag and asks, pleads, for peace. They ask, effectively, what will it take for us to be reconciled? What do we have to do to exchange this warfare for peace?

But what Paul is saying is that in the Gospel, the circumstances are exactly the other way round! In the gospel, Jesus, the victor, the conqueror, makes pleas for peace to the LOSER, to the conquered. We have offended God with our sin, and GOD is the one to come to us to make reconciliation. We are losing, and instead of US pointing to a white flag of surrender, God comes to the battlefield and points not to a flag, but to a cross, where his Son hangs and says, "LOOK! Now your offense is laid aside. Your sin, your disobedience, your rebellion is punished in my own Son. Now we have

peace.” The conqueror has reconciled us to himself through the life and death of Jesus. God has dropped his grievance against you because it is fully paid in his own Son.

You may feel in the fog of battle of life and weary, wondering whether God can love someone like you. Remember, Jesus was enough. There are times in the face of profound illness or dreams dashed or people around us not liking us or being hostile to us, when we wonder is God really for us? Is he there, present and loving or maybe he forgot...or has turned his back on us because of something we did. Remember Jesus was enough. Perhaps you feel like a rat on a wheel, trying to do enough to make it up to God. If I do these things, enough good things, then maybe he'll drop his grievance with me, or at least be distracted.

Friends, hear the Gospel announcement afresh. Let that crocus blossom in the cold, blanket of snow covering your heart again. God has made peace with you in the body of his own Son! We may experience peace because he made peace for us! Do you feel it? Do you know that you have peace in the place of war, life in exchange for death because of what God had done for you in Christ?

God gives us everything in forgiveness, life, peace, reconciliation...and he also calls for everything. One implication of being reconciled to the Lord of the universe is the recognition that we do not belong to ourselves but to him.

2. Belong to God

Look at the end of v. 15, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Being joined to Jesus by faith, we died with him, and also are raised with him to new life. We no longer live for ourselves, our agendas, our expectations or plans. He has put us to death and brought us to life in him, so that we are now free to live as people who belong to him! We follow him where he leads and calls.

That lies behind vs 17-18. We have a new life in us; we are a new creation. From a place of spiritual death, Jesus's life has taken root in us by the Spirit. That first crocus of new creation has been birthed in you and is now growing the spring of the life of Christ in you. What this means is if your life belongs to Jesus you are being transformed. And if you are being transformed by his life in you, you may find yourself being given freedom to live for his kingdom and agenda and expectations *rather than your own*. We are liberated from the prison of self by the life of Christ in us.

Many of us have seen the movie *Frozen*, and a few may have seen it dozens of times. If you haven't seen the movie, you've heard the song "Let It Go" sung by big and little girls...and big and little boys, everywhere. One friend pointed out a grand irony in that song in that part of the movie. Princess Elsa sang this enthralling song about her freedom, her power to be free and live like she wanted...all the while locked inside an ice prison of her own making. She belts out a really catchy tune about freedom while living in such a way that she is imprisoned.¹

We live the same way, thinking we are free to do what we want, but until the Spirit brings us to life, makes us a new creation, what we **want** is self-interested. Because we no longer belong to ourselves we don't *have* to live for ourselves any longer either. He gives us freedom from the domination of self, and enables us to follow after him. It is only God's power that can recreate us who formerly lived for ourselves and free us to pour out all I am, all I have, all my gifts, all my energies...not spent on myself, but on you, on our community, on our world. Only God can free a selfish person like me from me. How about you?

Let us make sure we hear and feel Jesus's offense: if we never feel called to do other than what we already want to do and are inclined to do, it is not Jesus we are following, but self. Where is he **calling and enabling** you by his powerful Spirit within you to live for him that might be uncomfortable? Follow him, perhaps into a difficult relationship that needs divine healing, or into a gospel conversation with your neighbor, or into our city as an agent of peace.

We belong to him, therefore we live for, and like, him.

3. Deployed for God

¹ Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2016), p. 140.

Since we belong to God, we are now deployed for God, to be reconciled reconcilers. Look at [v. 20](#), [Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us](#). An ambassador was the representative of some sovereign, an embodiment of a sovereign in a foreign land. Paul uses the image to suggest we are in a foreign land representing another sovereign ruler, King Jesus. Our lives are to be spent representing him, living for him, living LIKE him as his representatives, announcing and living his terms of peace out before a world captivated in death!

Our lives are given to us to be deployed not for our agendas or our ease, not even to make life flow according to how we expect it to go. Our lives are given so that we may be deployed to live for Christ. We are reconciled to him to be deployed as reconcilers in this world. **Our city need us to be reconcilers today.**

Another way to say it is this: we are on mission wherever we are, whenever we are. His kingdom principles of righteousness, holiness, truth, justice, compassion, valuing all image bearers, shapes how we do our work, how we love our families, how we serve our neighbors. You are an ambassador for Christ, that your life might reflect his values, his rule, and his life...for a world to see him through you. We live for him in part by living like him. Can people see Jesus in you?

Spring has come in our hearts. The crocus of reconciliation with God has blossomed. And now you, we, are that crocus of God's reconciling spring offered to the world around us. You are a new creation deployed into this world to be a first taste of his kindness, as reconciled reconcilers, healed healers. Into our world of death, go as one in whom Jesus is alive.