

2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Ambassadors for the Day of Good News
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
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Does anyone here have a favorite passage of Scripture, one you go to for encouragement? Maybe it's a familiar one like John 3:16 for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. Or Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...

You may not have one, maybe there's someone who's thinking to themselves, I'm not even sure what the names of the books are, that is ok. And if you don't, I want to commend to you one of my favorite scriptures. It's actually one of the verses Eric just read for us, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, but giving them the message of reconciliation."

Who or what is God? Who am I? What then am I to do? This verse from 2 Corinthians beautifully encapsulates these three questions: 1. God is in Christ, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. 2. Reconciling, restoring what once was fractured to its original condition. 3. Giving them the message of reconciliation, we are to be reconcilers. Ok, that's a very dense theological statement with a lot of churchy words. Let me see if I can make it more palatable. To do so, I want to point your attention to another of my favorite passages, this one's a story, it comes from 2 Corinthians 6. Now it's rather long, so for the sake of time I'll paraphrase.

The story is about 4 Lepers, 4 outcast, marginalized men in a city called Samaria. Samaria is a northern city in Israel, set up on a hill, it is in the midst of a drought, and lastly it is surrounded by an enemy army. Which means that nothing is going in, and nothing is coming out. And because we know from science class that water runs downhill and not up it, all food and water are gone from the city. Things are desperate. If you would like to read how desperate it was, you can find 2 Kings 6:28-29, it's a grizzly scene.

That's not my favorite part, that would be weird. I love this story because of how these lepers respond. You see they were very regular people, in fact because they were lepers they were actually on the bottom rung of society, the disease with which they were afflicted made them untouchable. So, one day one leper says to the others, maybe we should go out towards the camps of our enemies, perhaps they will give us food. And the other responds, but what if they kill us? Well we're lepers in a famine ravaged city, what have we got to lose? Good point.

So they leave Samaria and start walking towards the enemies camp, and as they are going the sound that fills the ears of the Arameans is the sound of stampeding horses charging towards them, and what do they do? The entire army turn tail and run, leaving everything they had behind. When these 4 poor lepers finally arrive what they find is empty tents filled with everything they could ever hope for or need, good food, clean water, silver, and gold.

After a while one said to the others, "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, let us go tell the Kings household."

You see, what these lepers held in their possession immanently good news; the kind of news that would quite literally save the lives of an entire city. And all they had to do was say something. This story is a beautiful metaphor for us in the Christian life. In Jesus Christ each one of us has been given immensely good news, the enemy that once surrounded us—sin and death and despair has been sent running into the night, and here we stand with everything we could ever hope for or imagine what we are left with is this question: “what should we do with that good news?”

This morning Eric read for us a passage that tells us that every good and perfect gift that we could ever need has been given to us in Jesus Christ, that he’s provided new life to us. And so, the question we have always before us is this one, where should we go from here?

Paul writes in verse 20: therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. The role or job that Paul gives to the Church is that of an ambassador. First of all, what is an ambassador? I think a pretty simple and comprehensive definition would be an official representative of a leader or sovereign sent on a mission to a foreign land. I want to spend some time looking at what this role of an ambassador means for us.

The first part I want to focus on is that an ambassador is someone who is sent. They are citizens of a particular place, they know the customs, the manners, the history, and the culture of that place. As an ambassador they are sent to a different land. They’re sent to a place that doesn’t have the same customs and traditions and beliefs as they do, and the ambassador is only an ambassador in that she is sent to that other place. If she were to stay in her land and invite people to come into experience life there, she would not be an ambassador. If she were to spend a lot of time figuring out how to attract people to come in he would not be acting as an ambassador. An ambassador is someone who leaves their home and goes to a new place.

Think back for a moment to the story of the lepers, when they came to the tent filled with food and good drink they were not in their home of Samaria. And the good news that they were now given was not for a foreign land, but for their home city that was suffering. But it was a city where the good news of God’s protection and care was entirely foreign and unknown, and so that is where these lepers were sent as heralds of good news.

Where is the place that you are sent with good news, to be an ambassador? Where is your Samaria. Is it your office, school, neighborhood, your social network, all around us are places where the message of Jesus Christ is calling us to bring good things to those who are hungry and thirsty for life.

The second part of this verse is that an ambassador is sent on a mission. There are lots of reasons why a ruler would send an ambassador. Paul knew that Ambassadors were sent with particular purposes, to negotiate, to form allegiances, try and work out peace. These are all things that ambassadors at this time would have been sent to do. Not one of these was what Paul meant for the Corinthians Church to do.

We’re not sent to negotiate, form allegiances, form borders, or work out peace agreements. What these lepers were called to do was very simply to share good news. Something happened here in the kingdom and it was unknown to those people over there, and it was the job of those who are sent is to share good news, not good advice, not make a compelling argument or win an argument, no those who share good news.

When Paul calls and sends us he tells us that we are ambassadors because we have been given the good news of God's reconciliation has already happened in Jesus Christ. What is that message? **One died for all, therefore all have died.** Jesus Christ has died for every person who has ever lived. For those who know him and for those who don't, for those who behave well and for those who behave badly. As he will say from another letter, Romans: **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

God has pursued you and me at the expense of his own Son that we would know and be given the good news that he did not withhold anything in restoring the relationship that was broken and marred by us. And every person you will ever meet, every Samaria you will ever come to, every scenario and environment in which you will ever encounter is filled with people whom God loved so much that he would give his own Son to be reconciled to. Everything that ever kept you from having an intimate relationship with God all the mistakes, all the shame, all the sin, and selfishness we could ever demonstrate or be enacted upon us has been taken away, now you are able to stand in the light of God's grace and live in the joyful news that Jesus has conquered it all and there is nothing, not in heaven and or on earth that will ever separate you from that amazing love and kindness.

Now you're probably thinking to yourself, Jonathan just said a lot of churchy words, and I think what he's saying is that I'm supposed to go and say the same in the places where I live. But I don't know if I can remember or if I even know what some of those words mean. I am not asking you learn a whole bunch of theological jargon, but I am asking you to learn enough of the content of the hope and faith you have to be able to share the joy that lives in you. That when someone says I don't know how you can believe in a God that could cause all this suffering, or who would reject me because I'm different or because of the choices I've made in the past, you can say to them I don't believe in that God either. The God I believe in shows great love for us in sending his son to die for us because he loves us, and wants to be merciful and compassionate towards us. The God we know from scripture is just, yes. And he does not like sin, but only in so far as it hurts his people and keeps them from knowing and living in love and intimacy with him. That's why God gets angry with sin, because of his parental love for his people and their well-being. I believe God is good, and his call for our life is to be people who share hope in Jesus Christ. This is the message we are sent with as ambassadors for Christ.

Last part of the definition. Ambassadors are sent into their Samarias as official representatives of the sovereign. You are called to represent (Literally: Re Present). The ambassador embodies the presence of the one who sent them. In an official capacity that ambassador brings the presence of the person who sent them into the new place. We must embody our sender to the world around us. This is the main work of the Church, it is not what happens here in worship, but how we are sent out to our places to embody the presence of the one who sends us in that place. In worship, this is where we get built up and prepared for the places we're sent. But the true purpose of the Church is not what happens only in our gatherings, but it is the way in which we are called to bear witness, to reveal the true identity of the sovereign. God has a mission, and the Church is his instrument for carrying out that mission. We are a missional church, and over the next few months I'll spend more time unpacking what that means and how it is going to impact our congregation in months and years to come.

We will be good ambassadors by having these 5 relationships. Right relationships with Jesus, One another, seekers, with our stuff, and with outsiders

1. Right relationship with Jesus: are you ready to let me give you your identity and hear my voice speaking to you and are you ready to follow?

2. One another: We will be people who have relationships that are characterized by love and responsibility to one another. We rejoice with each other, we weep with one another, we challenge and hold one another accountable, we push one another to grow and be better.

3. Towards seekers, we are welcoming. That is because we can all know and remember that there was a time when we were lost, when we were far off, when we were unsure or curious, and the gift that was given to us was the gracious invitation and warm welcome from Jesus to come into the safety of his love.

4. We will be people who share our stuff – Sharing your table, extra bedroom that could be used by someone who needs a place to stay. As we look towards a fundraising campaign where we will make improvements to our building, if we are acting as an ambassador we will consciously make decisions about how we use this place for those who are not a part of this place. This building is not ours, it does not exist to meet our needs only. This place is a gift from God, and its purpose is specifically for those who are not in it currently. Have you ever heard that definition? The church is the only organization that exists for those who are not members.

We are all lepers who, in one way or another, have found our way to the place where the best news in the world is found. It doesn't make us better than, it simply means we have a choice to make: what will we do with this good news that we have found? Jesus, in John 20:21 tells his disciples before he ascended: As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you, lepers, ambassadors, reconciled, beloved, saved.

Let's pray...