**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 2-26-2023
The Ministry of Reconciliation**

As most of you know, growing up I played a lot of sports. And one of those sports was baseball. And I still love baseball today, no matter how many rules the major leagues are changing this year.

But one year on my baseball team, I met a new teammate named Mike Ciarpella. I remember our first season as teammates. We were the green team. And we actually had a perfect season, before we lost in the first round of the playoffs. I’m still getting over that loss. No, not really.

Both Mike and I did a lot of pitching that year. And by the end of the season we became friends. And for a year or two, we were close. We played together outside of baseball and enjoyed each other’s’ company.

But then, somehow, we got into an argument. And it led to a fight – it was basically a wrestling match. And we kind of went our separate ways. This was while we were in middle school.

But time went on and by God’s grace I became a Christian. And with Mike a year behind me in school I didn’t really see him very often. We just didn’t really associate with one another.

 But then, as I continued to grow in my faith, there was a summer after high school that I was at my local town carnival. And I saw Mike there and felt the Holy Spirit leading me to go over to him and begin to talk. And we have a good conversation and I apologized for anything that I did that was wrong. We praised God we had peace again and reconciliation in our relationship.

Some years passed and then my parents shared the news with me that Mike had passed away. It was back in the spring of 2012. He was 29 years old.

While I am thankful that we did experience peace and reconciliation and healing in our relationship, if I would have known that would be the last time that I saw him, I would hope that I would have explicitly shared Jesus with Him as well. I do pray that he came to know and love our great savior.

I share this story with you, my friends, because part of our inheritance as Christians is to be ministers of reconciliation in this world. We are called to be peacemakers in the Name of Jesus and by the power of Jesus. Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. So part of doing our role as children of God today is being peacemakers, being ministers of reconciliation in this world.

Perhaps you have experienced brokenness in your relationships with others. Maybe it was with a friend or family member or a co-worker. And maybe that brokenness is still going on today. God’s heart is one of reconciliation.

And even more than people being reconciled to one another is the need for people to be reconciled to God. Our human race rebelled God way back at the beginning. And that is why Jesus came for us. The very name of Jesus means “The Lord saves.” Jesus came to save a lost humanity and to offer reconciliation to everyone.

The Lord calls Christians to follow His example.

As we now turn back to Paul’s letters to the Christians in Corinth, we will discover that God wants His church to be ministers of reconciliation in this world. Our highlighted Scripture today is 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Hear these very profound words from Paul the Apostle.

**For Christ’s love compels us, because 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 for them and was raised again.**

**So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

So what is going on in this passage? Paul would likely have asked this of his own life as he wrote these words.

If you recall from the Book of Acts, Paul opposed Jesus and His Church, even to the point of rounding Christians up and punishing them for their faith and sharing the good news of Jesus.

But God, in His mercy, revealed Himself to Paul. And Paul was transformed from being a persecutor to being a promoter of Jesus Christ. He was transformed from being an opponent to being an apostle. He was transformed from being an enemy of God to being an ambassador of Christ.

In short, Paul had experienced reconciliation of the most important kind – reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. And that changed everything for Paul. God turned Paul around and Paul so wanted everyone to experience that same reconciliation as well.

And this love of Christ had made its way in Paul’s life and he felt compelled to share how the invitation to reconciliation with God to as many people as possible. Paul risked his own safety time and time again because he wanted others to experience the peace with God that he had received. To Paul, all his suffering that he endured for the sake of the gospel was more than worth it.

If you are like me, you can just sense Paul’s excitement as you read this passage. The word “ambassadors” is so amazing. Paul is telling the Corinthian Christians that they are now Christ’s ambassadors. An ambassador is someone that represents something. Typically, an ambassador represents one country to another. Ambassador’s words are very important. They speak on behalf of their leader and their nation.

These Christians in Corinth were called to be ambassadors of Jesus. They were called to represent the Kingdom of God to those that lived around them. These Corinthian believers were not just called to be saved from their sins and reconciliate to God, but they were also all called to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ in this world. They were to represent the Kingdom of God to a world in need of reconciliation with its Creator.

Now I’m sure that the Christians in Corinth may have felt inadequate to be ambassadors of Christ. They were not Jesus or Paul and they may have felt unable to represent Jesus well.

But Paul could tell any of them that if God can forgive and be restored to someone like me – a persecutor of the church, and then use him as an ambassador to many people, then God can certainly use them as ambassadors as well.

The Church in Corinth was called to be that light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ. They were called to be ministers of reconciliation. They were called to be bold and courageous in reaching out to others in the name of Jesus. God wanted to speak through them and share His message of peace, of shalom, to the world that was in need of mercy and forgiveness. Jesus was the answer that the Corinthians were called to share with the world.

The truth is that because of the gospel, the way to reconciliation is actually quite simple. It is about surrender and submission to Jesus Christ and believing in what Jesus said and did.

By the power of God’s Spirit, the Lord makes people into new creations. The old is gone and the new has come. He forgave them and made them spiritually alive in Him and the Corinthians were called to be active and intentional ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

As Christians today, what is the main thing to take with us from this text? **It is to remember that you are called to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ today. You are called to the ministry of reconciliation today**. While this certainly should lead us to taking steps to offer reconciliation where there is brokenness in our relationships with others, this calling from Christ is even far greater than that.

The simple reality is that people need Jesus. And you are Christ’s ambassadors, His representatives, to this world. And God wants to speak through you. God wants to speak and to act through you.

Here are three important things to remember:

First, we do not have to be perfect in order to be an ambassador. The only perfect ambassador of God is Jesus. And Jesus, of course, of God the Son.

None of us are perfect. Paul wasn’t perfect. Peter wasn’t perfect. And neither was anyone else. Sometimes we may feel like a broken jar of clay. We may feel weak and powerless. We may feel that we don’t know enough or understand enough.

But please do not let that stop you. In our weakness, God is strong. And God can and does do so much through broken people. So please do not rule yourself out from being powerfully used by God. You are called to the ministry of reconciliation. You are called to be a peacemaker in Jesus’ Name.

Second, remember that being an ambassador of Christ is a fulltime calling. This is not something that we turn on and off. We represent Jesus all the time and everywhere. So let us seek to do that well, by the grace of God.

We are ambassadors of Christ at our jobs and in our homes and at the grocery store and the park or wherever we find ourselves. Everything we do will shape us to be either a better ambassador or a poorer ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Third and finally, how God uses us as His ambassadors may be different for every one of us, but we are still called to be ambassadors. Not everyone is called to preach, or teach, or be an evangelist but all of us are called to share the good news of Jesus. We are all called to pray for the lost. And all of us are called to know and share our own story of how Jesus has reconciled us to God by His grace.

Finally, remember that we only get this time on this earth. In eternity, we will not have the opportunity, but we do now. We are to be gentle and humble and respectful. But we are called to be bold as the love of Christ compels us to share Jesus in this world.

This is God’s heart. I believe that the Lord celebrated my reconciliation with Mike. But there is more rejoicing in heaven when reconciliation with God takes place. I celebrate that each of you has been reconciled to God.

This life is very transient. It is like a wisp in the wind. I’m 40 now, but in some ways, I still feel like I’m 20. It doesn’t seem that it was very long ago in some ways when I was back on the green team, playing baseball with Mike and others. Maybe you can identify with me.

Friends, in this quickly moving life that God has given us, one of our greatest privileges is being an ambassador of Jesus. Let us be bold and may the love of Christ compel us to share about our Lord and His Kingdom in this world.

Invite people to church, to Bible study, to your house. Start conversations. Ask people about what makes them tick. Let the Spirit lead.

Jesus is the answer for the world today. Above Him, there’s no other. Jesus is the way. May we as Chestnut Grove Church be that light on a hill sharing His love and His grace with a world that so needs Him. All of us are called to the important ministry of reconciliation. Help us, dear Lord, to do this well. In Jesus’ Name we pray, Amen.

Recourses:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

[Jesus Is The Answer For The World Today - Andrae` Crouch (Song & Lyrics) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGfiKwgsoOc)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGfiKwgsoOc>