7.5.2009 Pentecost 5 – St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA

In Christ Jesus, through whom we have indeed been reconciled to God, dear fellow redeemed:

NIV 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 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. 16 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. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 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. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is the Word of God. Relationships…they are the beauty of life, and they can be the bane of life. They bring us sweet joy, and can also bring us stinging sorrow. When things go right in our relationships, things are good in our lives, but when things go wrong in those relationships, then all of life seems bad. When a husband and a wife are having problems—when either harsh words flow out of their mouths, or an strange silence fills the room, tension builds and it can be felt. Relief finally comes, however, when one or the other seeks reconciliation. An apology is offered; tears begin to flow; the couple embraces; their commitment to love is renewed.

My dear friends, of all of the relationships in our lives, the most important without doubt and without exception is our relationship with God. He created us and made us who we are. He sustains us in life, for without Him we could not continue to exist. He has destined us to live forever. Our existence is not limited to this world and the brief time we spend here. Rather God has designed us to live throughout eternity. The question is, "Where will we spend eternity?" Will we go to heaven to be with God, or to hell to be with Satan? While some may argue that you need not worry about that question, it is relevant for each of us. None of us knows when we will die. That is why our relationship with God is so important. By nature we are separated from God because of sin. We are His enemies—not by His choice, but by our own stubborn will and corrupt actions. We have by our sins separated ourselves from God. Consequently, our destiny would have been sealed forever in the depths of hell were it not for the blessed fact that God by grace sought our reconciliation. He acted to remove the barrier of sin and to reaffirm His commitment to us. The apostle Paul assures us in this precious text that **WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST!** By His grace and through faith He declares us to be His children once again. What is the result of these actions? **As God's children we are motivated by Christ, dedicated to Christ, renewed through Christ, and** finally **are ambassadors for Christ!**

1. As God's children we are motivated by Christ!

The apostle begins this text by saying, **14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.** To clarify Paul's intended meaning, we need to know whether **Christ's love** Paul mentions is the love we have for Christ, or the love Christ has for us. While the phrase could be taken in either way, Christ's unending, unchanging, ever-present love for us is to motivate us in our Christian faith and living… in other words, His love motivates our love for Him!

Unless we understand, however, our great need for Christ's love, it will not motivate us long or well. I mentioned earlier that we are by nature estranged from God because of our sin—that we are by nature His enemies. Yet, those phrases can so easily pass right over our heads without much thought or understanding. It is so easy to begin thinking like the world. "So we aren't perfect," the world says. "Nobody is, after all, so we needn't get too worked up about it!" Yet, our God demands perfection and nothing less. The apostle James points out that even if we were able to keep the entire law of God with only one, slight infraction, we would still be guilty of all. There are no grades of perfection. You cannot be 99% perfect. You must be 100% perfect, and that is impossible! Nor can we take comfort in simply trying to be good, or even succeeding in being pretty good. Sin—any sin, any single sin—damns, and our sinful flesh resents and rebels against such divine justice!

The extent of Christ's love for us, however, is seen in that fact that in spite of our sinful rebellion, and while we were still His enemies, **"*Christ died for us*"** (Romans 5:8). He died as our substitute, bearing our sins, enduring divine judgment of sin in our place. Paul explains God's plan in our text, when he says, **21 God (*the Father)* made him *(Jesus)* who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Jesus was sinless, yet God placed our sins upon Him. When He—the perfect sacrifice—died on our behalf, it was as if all of us died—suffering the punishment our sins deserved. Consequently, with our sins removed and the barrier between God and us destroyed, we have been declared righteous and the dear children of God. "What wondrous love it this," the hymnwriter exclaims, "to bear the dreadful curse for my soul" (WS 723:1). It is that unchanging, unending love of Christ, which serves to motivate our lives of Christian love and service. Dear friends, **WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST! As God's children we are motivated by Christ!**

2. As God's children we are also dedicated to Christ!

Paul says, **15 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.** Notice the purpose of Christ's love. He did not die for us and free us from our sins so that we might continue in sin and serve ourselves by fulfilling our sinful pleasures. No, we are to serve Christ, but not a dead Christ. Rather, we are to serve a living Christ, who **rose again** from the dead, and who as the Scriptures fully testify is seated at God's right hand in glory at this very moment—guiding, governing, and blessing us through His word!

The world and the people of the world certainly see things differently. The world lives unto itself. The world suggests that it is just common sense to look out for and take care of number one! The world suggests that there may be some time in the distant future when it might be possible to consider the needs of others, but that time is not now. Consequently, when priorities are set in the world—love of God and service to neighbor so often takes a back seat to pure selfishness! Even when individuals are moved to serve God and love neighbor, it is often for the wrong reasons—as means of meriting God's favor, rather than thanking Him for His grace!

Yet children of God, motivated by Christ's love, seek to dedicate their lives to Jesus. In view of the fact that we are forgiven, that we have the certain promise of everlasting life, and that we know that God will work all things together for our good in this world, we need not approach life with fear and apprehension. Rather, we can focus on the will of God for our lives—seeking to honor Him with all of our words and actions, while revealing our love for Him by loving others. The apostle encourages us, ***hatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him…. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ*** (Colossians 3:17,23). Yes, dear friends, **WE**

HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST! As God's children we are dedicated to Christ!

3. As God's children we are also renewed through Christ!

Now, that all sounds nice and good you may be thinking, but it does not always go that way in my life. All too often, I find my priorities messed up, and I say and do things that reflect my own selfish desires, rather than the selfless love of Christ. That may be true, but do not despair. The apostle spoke of a war going on within his body between his faith and his old sinful flesh. If the apostle faced such a battle, we can surely expect no less. Yet, there is hope. Listen to Paul as he says, **17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.**

Notice how Paul says that **all things are of God!** We are by nature dead in sin, but God comes to us with His Spirit and makes us alive again. He makes of us **a new creation**—a creation that possesses a new heart. The prophet Ezekiel explains this divine and dramatic change with these words, ***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I willl take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statues, and your will keep My judgments and do them*** (Ezekiel 36:26-27). While Christians of all ages have had to struggle with their sinful flesh, they still could say with all confidence as the apostle Paul, ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*** (Philippians 4:13). Why and how? Because **WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST! As God's children we are renewed through Christ!**

4. As God's children we are finally ambassadors for Christ!

Are we to be wall flowers? Our God has given us a glorious ministry, described by these words of the apostle Paul, **God… gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 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.** My friends, Jesus Christ died to reconcile the world to God. There is not a single person on this planet, who has not been reconciled by the blood of Christ. The sins of the world have been paid for by the all-atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and God does not impute those trespasses any more. That is true for everyone—Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist—all have been reconciled, but, unfortunately, not all are aware, nor do all benefit.

Yes, God loved the world and sent His Son (cf. John 3:16)! Jesus died for the world (cf. 1 John 2:2)! God has justified the world (cf. Romans 3:24)! Yet, the blessings of forgiveness, of spiritual rebirth, of life everlasting are received by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life (cf. John 14:6), and that is why it is so important that we speak these truths as the Lord gives us opportunity. We have the words of life—the words every man, woman, and child need to hear.

Jesus says, ***You are my witnesses*** (Acts 1:8). Plead with your brothers, your sisters, your countrymen, and everyone—***be reconciled to God!*** Do not be hard-hearted, but rejoice that God has made the first step towards improving your relationship with Him. It is an offer no one can afford to reject, for the eternal future of us all rests upon it. Rejoice, therefore, dear friends for **WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST!** Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.