

2 Corinthians 5
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
March 10, 2013
Fourth Sunday of Lent

When Paul uses the word which is translated “reconcile” he means something different than the common English meaning. When we use the word, “reconcile” we usually mean one of two things: Most common is the restoring a relationship as in, “Jack and Jill were reconciled after a period of separation.” Also common is the sense of acceptance of a disappointing situation as in, “Mary became reconciled to the fact that she would not be able to take the vacation to Puerto Rico this year.” Finally and less frequently than in prior years is the sense of balancing income and expenses in our bank accounts as in, “After three hours of frustration, Candace reconciled her check book with her bank statement.”

The three meanings might be expressed this way: “After three days of bitter argument Jack and Jill were reconciled when they became reconciled to the fact that they could not reconcile their bank statement with the check book and decided to go to the bank for help.”

These three common uses of this English word speak of a restoration of balance and perspective. Indeed the assumption is that underlying all life is a balance which when we lose that it we become anxious and conflicted; and when we recover that balance we have a sense of peace and restoration of the flow of life.

When I laid out the various meanings of “reconcile” I could see why translators used this word to render the Greek. However, the English translations fail to express the heart of the matter.

The word Paul uses in this passage is *kallaso* which means a fundamental and radical change. The word recognizes the symptoms of imbalance and loss of perspective. It recognizes that underlying all of life is a basic order and balance. It recognizes that most of the distress in the world—both personal and communal—reflects a loss of that balance. It even recognizes that reconciliation involves a return to that balance. But it is here that the connection between the Greek and the English words end.

When Paul uses the word *kallaso* he means the righting of a relationship which it is beyond human power to resolve. For Paul, a more accurate and potent description of the need for reconciliation is *disorder*. It is Paul's deep conviction that the pain and violence in the world and within the human heart is the result of a fundamental disorder at the very center of human life. That disorder, while most obviously displayed in human relationships, is in fact symptom of the primary disorder of human relationship with *God*. This disorder goes back to the very beginning, when the man Paul calls the *first Adam*, caused the disorder by seeking to be *like God*.

What we call the original sin that is the human action which caused the disorder in the relationship between humanity and God took place because we were not satisfied with the place in the world created for us by God. We wanted more. We wanted to be "like God." In short we rejected the gracious place that God had created for us.

Think about it. A rock is happy to be a rock. A tree is content to be a tree. A birds, fish indeed all created things *except* human beings accept their place in the created order. They are part of the order. It is only human beings who strive to have more, do more, and be more. Do not misunderstand me; I am not saying that having aspirations is wrong, aiming to make the

most out of this gift of life. But our striving so often comes from the fact that we do not know who we are to begin with. When I was a second grader I took a standardized test which indicated that I was an “underachiever.” What is an achiever? What is the standard for meeting my potential? What should I be doing to make up for this grievous fault? As an eight year old I had no clue what any of this meant. I only knew that, according to the test I was a failure.

My point is this: unless we have a basic sense of our goodness and a clear view of the goodness of the life God intends for us, we cannot by our own efforts create a satisfying and fulfilling life. Until we have a deep internal sense of our worth and purpose we have no inner gyroscope to tell us when we are on the right path. As a result we put way too much importance on the messages from the world around us. We put way too much importance on what others say about us and our lives are run by circumstance rather than the rock foundation of our relationship with God.

Because of the action of the first Adam we cannot correct this disorder by our own efforts. It is only God who can restore the relationship. He began this restoration with the covenant he made with Israel. “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Torah is the basis for this restored relationship and loving obedience to Torah is the path to reconciliation.

Was the first covenant inadequate? Certainly not! Yet did it have the desired effect? Obviously not. The disorder persisted in Israel and also in the world at large. According to Paul, that God sent a *second Adam* to do for humanity what we were unable to do for ourselves. That second Adam was and is Jesus Christ. According to Paul, Jesus took upon himself the disordered relationship between God and humanity. The resulting pain, grief, anger, jealousy, self pity, resentment of that disorder took its course—that is death. In allowing Jesus to suffer and die

and raising him from the dead God restored the original order. The sacrifice of the second Adam overcame the rebellion of the first Adam. Thus, Paul proclaims that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them. In short, in Christ God restored the original order.

This message of reconciliation is easier to talk about than it is to do. Paul's own beloved Corinthians were hardly an orderly and peaceful group of people. The message is hard to accept. We hear that in Christ God has restored the original order, but we have the devil of a time practicing this good news in our daily lives. We still feel so responsible. We still feel like we are falling short. We do not have a clear feeling of what emotional and spiritual health looks like. How can we make the restored order real in our lives?

Our job is not to create ourselves to be worthy of this new relationship. It is to accept it; to receive it; to stop trying to earn it and simply say "thank you!" We become reconciled to God when we become reconciled to the fact that we cannot reconcile our "accounts" with God and need to come to Jesus for help. We need to believe that in fact Jesus is God's chosen means of reconciliation and we need to accept him into our hearts.

Friends the key phrase from Paul is this, "that God in Christ *was reconciling* the world...." It is an ongoing effort. God now has entrusted us with this ministry. We now seek to grow in this restored order. We now no longer hold our sins against ourselves or hold the sins of others against them. Our mission is to be an outpost of Christ's reconciliation: a new order of life which was the old order of life and is the life of hope. Amen