

**“Ambassadors of Reconciliation” 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

**I would imagine that almost everyone in this country can name the current President of the United States. Whether you like him or don't like him, everyone knows him. The same thing could probably be said about the Vice-President.**

**I wouldn't be surprised if many of us could identify our state's governor or even our representatives in Congress. And people tend to recognize the mayor of the town where they live.**

**But how many of us know who our ambassadors are? That's right. Ambassadors. Thomas Jefferson was the U. S. Ambassador to France and George H. W. Bush was once the U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Shirley Temple even served as the Ambassador to Czechoslovakia and Ghana.**

**But the vast majority of our ambassadors are not household names. The United States has ambassadors in just about every other nation on the planet, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, in big countries like Russia and China and tiny dots on the map like Tuvalu and Liechtenstein.**

**In preparation for this sermon, I looked up some information this week about our current ambassadors. But if you offered me a nickel for every one I could name, I wouldn't get more than 10 cents.**

**Ambassadors are pretty important even if they are not well-known. They live in foreign lands and represent the government of this country while they are there. They act and speak on behalf of their ruler. They are responsible for communicating the message of their leader--a king or queen, a president or a prime minister--to others faithfully and carefully.**

**I mention this little lesson in government this morning because the apostle Paul makes the claim that *you and I* are ambassadors. We are ambassadors for Christ in this world where we live. We represent Jesus in this place. We act and speak on his behalf. We are responsible for communicating the message of our King, the message of the gospel, to those around us faithfully and carefully.**

**And that message is this. A new creation has come! Something amazing has happened! A great change has occurred! A great transformation has taken place!**

**And for Paul, that transformation can be summed up in one word: *reconciliation*. That is what has happened. God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.**

**When two persons are reconciled, they are brought back together. The relationship between them is restored. They are drawn back into fellowship with each other.**

**According to Paul, this is what has taken place on the cross. Through Jesus Christ, God has stepped in and reached out to gather us back into the circle. Through Jesus Christ, God has stepped in and reached out to set things right between us. Through Jesus Christ, God has come near to be with us in all of our suffering and pain.**

**Reconciliation means that two persons are reunited after having been separated. Reconciliation means that their relationship is healed after having been broken.**

**Recently, my wife was reading a book that had to do with the English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her romance with Robert Browning, who was quite an accomplished poet himself, was one of the greatest love stories in literary history.**

**Apparently, it was one of those rare cases of love at first sight. While Robert was courting Elizabeth, they exchanged 574 letters in less than two years. That's almost a letter a day. And they were married for 15 years until Elizabeth died in 1861.**

**Her relationship with her father, however, was much more troubled. A childhood illness and a horseback riding accident had left her almost an invalid. Her father took care of her for several years, but unfortunately Mr. Barrett became very possessive and overprotective of his daughter.**

**When his daughter fell in love with Robert Browning, Mr. Barrett was extremely jealous. He was so strongly opposed to their marriage that they were forced to elope and get married in secret. And when Mr. Barrett found out what had happened, he disowned his daughter and they never spoke to one another again.**

**It was not for lack of trying on Elizabeth's part. She made every effort at reconciliation. Nearly every week, for almost ten years, she wrote letter after letter to her father in an effort to mend their broken relationship.**

**But one day, she received a large box in the mail. And inside that box, there were ten years' worth of letters. Not a single one had been opened. Not one.**

**These were some of the most beautiful letters ever written in the English language. If Mr. Barrett had only read a couple of them, then perhaps their relationship could have been restored. Healing could have taken place. But as it was, her pleas for reconciliation were never heard.<sup>1</sup>**

**As God's ambassadors, we are like God's letters sent to the world. Our calling is to make sure that this message of reconciliation *is* heard. God is making his appeal through us.**

**This is our ministry, the ministry of reconciliation. Our ministry is not to fight against the world on God's behalf. Our ministry is not to guard the boundaries of the kingdom so that only certain people can get inside.**

**Our ministry is the message of reconciliation. Our ministry is sharing with the world the good news that God himself has opened his arms on the cross to embrace us. God has not disowned any of us. God has not abandoned us. God claims each and every one of us as his child.**

**Because of Jesus Christ, because of his life and death and resurrection, we know that things have changed. God gives us this ministry of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors. And as Christ's ambassadors, we have been given the message that God has transformed the world. Everything has been made new!**

**And as Christ's ambassadors, we are invited to see the world with new eyes. We are called to see the world with the eyes of Christ and not from the old point of view. If God has reached out to claim every one of us as his child, the world has changed and our way of looking at the world, our way of looking at one another, cannot help but change as well.**

**Malusi Mpumlwana is a Bishop in the Episcopal Church of Ethiopia. But for many years, he was an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa.**

**Up until 1994, the law of apartheid in South Africa required white people and black people to live separately, go to school separately, and socialize separately. Black South Africans were required to serve white South Africans. The white population was smaller than the black population, but they kept their control of the country by ruling with an iron fist.**

**For his protests against these government policies, Bishop Mpumlwana was arrested. He was imprisoned. And he was tortured.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/r/reconciliation.htm>

Yet it was in the midst of being tortured and beaten that he began to see things from a different point of view. Even as he looked at those who were hurting him, even as he thought about those who thought of him as less than human and wanted to keep him and others like him “in their place”, he refused to see them as his enemies. As people to be destroyed. As people God had disowned.

Deep in his heart and soul, he had an astounding insight that could only have come from the Holy Spirit. *“These are God’s children,”* he thought to himself, *“and they are losing their humanity. We must help them recover it.”*<sup>2</sup>

This is seeing the world through the eyes of Christ. This is what it means to look at the world as an ambassador of reconciliation.

The dividing lines that we think are so important no longer matter. God has dismantled the old categories, our old standards of judgment. As Paul tells us in another of his letters, in Christ, there is no Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, black and white, native and immigrant, us and them. All have been made one family in Christ. All have been made children of God.

This is God’s new creation. This is God reconciling the world to himself through the cross of Jesus Christ. And as Christ’s ambassadors, we are called to spread this message of reconciliation. We are to share the good news that there is a new creation. The world has been made new.

And more than that, *we ourselves* have been made new. If we are in Christ, we ourselves change. We embody this reconciliation in our lives. We do not just talk about a new creation or point to a new creation.

We become a new creation. We become the righteousness of God. As God’s righteousness lived and breathed in Jesus Christ, so God’s righteousness is to live and breathe in us.

We are ambassadors of reconciliation. And that means that we are called to be signs of reconciliation. We are called to be examples of reconciliation.

On November 14, 1940, during World War II, German planes conducted a bombing raid on the city of Coventry in the center of Britain. The bombs did a great deal of damage including destroying the Coventry Cathedral.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustrations\\_for\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id=93040948](https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=93040948)

**The senior priest at the Cathedral, Richard Howard, looked through the rubble of the church the next morning. And he found three large roofing nails in all the dust and destruction.**

**He bound those nails together with wire in the shape of the cross. It was placed above the altar when the new cathedral was built and it continues to hang there today.**

**At the same time, Father Howard took his hand and traced two simple words on the smoke-blackened wall of the sanctuary. *Father, forgive*, he wrote.**

**And after the Second World War was over, they went back and took some more of the nails from the ruins of Coventry Cathedral and made several more crosses. These crosses were given to German churches that had been destroyed by Allied bombing raids in Berlin, Dresden, and Kiel.**

**Nowadays, there are almost 200 of these crosses around the world. They are in churches in Baghdad in Iraq, in the Ukraine, in Israel, in Palestine, and in the Sudan. And these churches belong to a group who call themselves the Community of the Cross of Nails.<sup>3</sup>**

**These crosses hang in church sanctuaries throughout the world reminding all of us of the cross on which Jesus gave his life. These crosses open our eyes to see the world through the eyes of God who has reconciled *the world* to himself. Not just you. Not just me. But the whole entire world.**

**These crosses are the sign of how God has erased all the old distinctions, all the old hostilities, all the boundary lines that separate us from one another. The crosses refuse to allow us to regard anyone from a worldly point of view. As one of my friends and colleagues posted on his Facebook page this week, none of us can ever look into the eyes of someone God does not love.**

**Yes, we are all called to be a part of the Community of the Cross of Nails. We are called to speak on behalf of the One who was nailed to that cross. We are called to represent our King who desires nothing more than to bring us all together to live in love and peace.**

**We are called to proclaim the new creation without the old dividing lines and hostilities. We are called to *be* the new creation. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation.**

**May we do so faithfully and humbly.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crossofnails-na.org/about/>

**In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**