

Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Lent3: Our Ministry of Reconciliation**

March 19th, 2023. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Luke 15:1-7,11-32**

1. In Christ: A New Creation

- **We are God's New Creation in Christ**

**"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
he is a new creation;
old things have passed away;
behold, all things have become new. "**

2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

**"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation:
The old has gone, the new is here!" NIV**

- **"In Christ"**

David Garland out points that,

"in Christ," can mean several things that are not mutually exclusive:

- that one belongs to Christ,
- that one lives in the sphere of Christ's power,
- that one is united with Christ,
- or that one is part of the body of Christ, the believing community"¹

- **"A New Creation"**

Jesus called this being "born again," transformation effected by the Spirit of God in a person - John 3

¹ The New American Commentary

“Jesus answered him [Nicodemus], “Very truly, I tell you, **no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**” 4Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?” 5Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, **no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.**” John 3:3-6 NRSV

Clearly, being born again is the work of the Holy Spirit of God in a person's heart or spirit. “What is born of the Spirit is spirit.” It is the spirit of a person, the person's inner being, that is transformed by the Spirit of God.

When does this happen?

When we accept, believe, and receive Christ into our hearts:

“But **to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,** 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

John 1:12-13 NRSV

“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:9 NRSV

How do we know it has happened?

- ***By the inner witness or assurance of the Holy Spirit.*** We know with a confidence we can't always explain. We experience the fruits of the Spirit within – joy, peace, love, etc.

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba,

Father.” **16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.**” Romans 8:15-17 NIV

- ***We see the evidence of love for others in our lives.***
“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.”
1 John 3:14 NRSV

- **Saved, Not to Live for Ourselves, but for Christ**

Thanks be to God for the work of the Spirit of God in us. We are born again when we accept, receive, and believe in Christ. We have experienced the love of God in Christ.

Paul emphasizes two important points:

- The love of God that we have experienced is for all. This love should compel us to share Christ with others, because Christ died for all in our place.
- Christ died for us, so we should now live for Christ

14For **Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15And 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.**” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NIV

2. **Our Calling: Christ’s Ambassadors of Reconciliation**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation:

The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

18“**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us**

20So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 NRSV

- God has reconciled us to himself through Christ
- God has given and entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation
- We are ambassadors for Christ
 - called to entreat and persuade others to be reconciled to God
 - thus, we must imitate Jesus

How did Christ Jesus reach people with God's love?

We see that in what Jesus was criticized about. Luke 15 gives us a good example.

1Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.

2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,

"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:1-3 NRSV.

3. The Prodigal Son: A Tale of Reconciliation & Two Brothers - Luke 15:11-32

The familiar story of the prodigal son shows us how God is yearning for all to be reconciled to the Lord in Christ. The father in the story demonstrates the heart of God our Father in heaven. The Lord is yearning to be reconciled with all human beings who have wandered away from His love and care and provision.

We see that the father in the story shared his wealth between the two brothers. One wasted his wealth.

The other did not waste his wealth, but neither did he seem to do much with it. Yet he complained when his brother became reconciled with his father and the father celebrated. As Christians we must be wary of self-righteousness and condemnation of others. We must yearn like our Father yearns for all to be reconciled to Him.

4. Our Task: “to invite, to convince, to offer Christ, to build up” others

In June 1744, the first ever Methodist Conference in the world was held in England. John Wesley chaired the meeting and many who were busy sharing the gospel through preaching and evangelism gathered. The minutes of the meeting records a question they asked themselves, and the answer they came up with:

“What is the best general method in preaching?”

The answer was (and still is):

**“To invite,
To convince,
To offer Christ; and, lastly,
To build up,
- and to do this (in some measure) in EVERY sermon.”**

That is our task as Ambassadors of Christ. That is your task, and that is my task.

We should be doing this whether we are preaching from the pulpit or telling others about Christ wherever we find ourselves. We are to do this with whomever we interact with. *We preach with our lives AND with our lips.* In this Lent season and for the rest of our lives, let us aim to invite, to convince, to offer Christ to all, and thus to make and build disciples for Christ.

There is a popular saying that is generally attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

“Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.”

It sounds good but it is not wholly true. The gospel must be preached. It must be spoken out with words. Our lives must back up what we preach though.

The early Methodists got it right. As Paul urged Timothy,

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

2 Timothy 4:2 NIV