

Pastor's Message  
August 23, 2020

Hi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Hope you are all doing well!!

This week we continue reflecting on Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he talks about our call to work toward restoration and reconciliation. Throughout this sermon series, let us listen to the words of Paul letter, as if this letter was written to our group of friends, to our group of colleagues or to our group of sisters and brothers in Christ to see what advice Paul has to offer for us in these challenging times.

Hope to see you tomorrow.

God's Peace!

Pastor Denise

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

A reading from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> chapters of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians.

There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

**5** <sup>1-5</sup> For instance, we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven—God-made, not handmade—and we'll never have to relocate our "tents" again.

Sometimes we can hardly wait to move—and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what's coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we're tired of it!

We've been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less.

**6-8** That's why we live with such good cheer. You won't see us drooping our

heads or dragging our feet! Cramped conditions here don't get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead.

It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going. Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? When the time comes, we'll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.

**9-10** But neither exile nor homecoming is the main thing. Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that's what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. Sooner or later we'll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what's coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad.

**11-14** *That* keeps us vigilant, you can be sure. It's no light thing to know that we'll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That's why we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God.

God alone knows how well we do this, but I hope you realize how much and deeply we care. We're not saying this to make ourselves look good to you. We just thought it would make you feel good, proud even, that we're on your side and not just nice to your face as so many people are.

If I acted crazy, I did it for God; if I acted overly serious, I did it for you. Christ's love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do.

**14-15** Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

**16-20** Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore.

Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!

All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.

We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

**21** How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.  
AMEN

As we continue listening to the words that Paul shared with the Corinthians, we have reached the part of this letter where Paul is reminding the Corinthians not only of their vocation to be the messenger, but also of the message that we as God's messengers are called to share.

The message that takes shape from the life that Jesus lived. That is: how he treated the last, the least and the lost of society; the stories that Jesus told; and the revelation of resurrected life that the disciples have come to know through their encounter with the risen Lord.

In the last chapter, Paul uses an image of a clay pot to communicate to the Corinthians that God chooses to do God's work through the ordinary. There is an earthy and organic and humble quality to the servants that God uses to do God's work. For those who are called are not flashy or ornate

as fine china, but are as unassuming, as flawed and as fragile as a clay jar.

And it is through the ordinary, it is through the flaws and the brokenness of God's beloved children that God's message of love, God's message of grace, God's acts of forgiveness and mercy are revealed.

But this message of love and forgiveness, this message of grace and mercy, this message of compassion and respect, this message of God's pronouncement of justice contradicts our experiences here on Earth.

These gospel stories like the father who welcomes the prodigal son home with open arms, the workers in the vineyard who were all paid a wage that would sustain their families whether they worked for only an hour or they worked the entire day, the story of the farmer who sows seed where the chance of it taking root are slim to

none or the stories where we are called to love our enemies and treat all God's children with respect, dignity and compassion.

All these stories proclaim the gospel as a way of life that is counter to the way of world as we know it.

All these stories are the gospel message that we are called to share, even though we can't imagine living in that world of which Jesus speaks. Because, these gospel stories challenge the choices we make, challenge the actions we take, and challenge the privilege that we claim and protect.

Our life experiences, that is those things we have seen with our own eyes, those things that we have heard with our own ears, those places where we find our identity, our confidence and our comfort; in so many instances contradict the gospel that Jesus proclaimed with his words and with his life.

Even a life filled with making good choices and living as "good people"

according to the world's standards, falls way short of the ways of the kingdom. Even though that is the kingdom that we pray will one day be a reality here on earth as it is in heaven.

But this kingdom work, this radical reconciling of God's people is the hard and the radical work we are called to do, (in the words of the late John Lewis) we are called by our creator to roll up our sleeves and get into "good trouble" for the sake of the Lord.

And because there is such a mismatch between our life experiences and the gospel message, we can not put our trust in our experiences, or in our current practices or even in our traditions.

Which means that we need to put our trust in God, who we came to know through the life and ministry of Jesus. Trust in God to not just lead us, but trust in God to inspire us, to empower us and to embolden us to walk by faith (not by sight or experience) to places we have never gone before.

The gospel writer John reminds us that God so loved the world that he sent his son to die for us so that we have eternal life. And Paul elaborates on that proclamation to remind the Corinthians that what God has accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of his beloved Son Jesus is to reconcile all people to God's self and in doing so, God frees us to reconcile ourselves to one another.

In Paul's words - All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.

God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.

We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. This is the work we are called to do to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth as it is in heaven.

This is the work that God has commanded, commissioned and called us to do. This work of restoration and reconciliation:

reconciling our differences and restoring are relationships with those who have sinned against us.

reconciling our differences and creating new relationships with those who look, who talk, who pray, who love and who see the world differently from the way we see and understand the world.

reconciling our differences and repairing relationships with those we have used, oppressed and/or ignored

In other words, loving one another as God has first and will always love us.

God took care of and continues to take care of our relationship with God's self, – as he put the wrong on Jesus who never did anything wrong, so we could be forever be in right relationship with God.

Now God is calling us to trust in God, trust in God's ways and take care of restoring, building and nurturing our relationships with one another.

So that one day - God's kingdom may  
become a reality here on Earth as it is  
in heaven.

**AMEN**

*Blessing*

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,  
nor things present, nor things to come,  
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,  
nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,  
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,  
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

*Amen.*