

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (Fourth Sunday in Lent—Series C)
“Reconciled in Christ”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
March 27, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is Epistle lesson recorded in 2 Corinthians 5.

¹⁶Therefore, we know from now on no one according to the flesh, if also we knew Christ according to the flesh, but now we no longer know Him in that way. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ—a new creation! The old things have passed away, behold, the new things have come. ¹⁸Now all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹For in this way God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them, and entrusting to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ since God, as it were, makes His appeal through us. We beg you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For us, He made Him sin who did not know sin, so that we, in Him, might become the righteousness of God.

Divisions need to be healed. Conflicts have to be resolved. Separations need to be reconciled. Reconciliation is not an unfamiliar term in our society. When married couples experience difficulties, they might separate as they work through them with a pastor or counselor. When they reunite, having worked through the things that are truly important in their relationship, they celebrate reconciliation. In a management or labor disagreement, as we saw in Major League Baseball this year, we say that the two sides are reconciled when to come to an agreement and the dispute ends. It has been said that whatever causes people to take sides, either as individuals or as groups, is overcome through reconciliation.

In the opening verse of our Epistle text, Paul writes about no longer knowing or regarding another person or group of people “according to the flesh.” Christians are no longer to regard others in “fleshly” or “worldly” ways. The Rev. Dr. Jacob Preus wrote in his book, *Just Words*, “We have separated ourselves from one another in many ways. One truly sad reality in the history of the western world, particularly in the United States, is that race has

become the focal point of hatred and fear. We have built a great wall of division between the races—a wall that has social, cultural, and economic aspects. Whatever its makeup, however, no one can ignore the impenetrable wall that has been erected between the races, particularly between blacks and whites. What . . . millions . . . do not know is that the fractures and divisions that exist between people are only a dim image of [a] much deeper division, a much more profound and disturbing separation, a primal alienation.”¹

Considering others “according to the flesh” is a dim image of humanity’s separation from God. We read in Ephesians 2 that there is a dividing wall of actual hostility between God and His human creatures. As a result of being sinners by nature, all people are at war with God. We have grieved and wounded God through our own sin and our hostility toward Him. We fight against Him and His good commandments all the time, seeking our own way rather than His way. By nature, we have, time and again, rejected Him and His Word. We’ve done it “our way” and not His loving way. We’ve counted ourselves better than others because obviously we must be better than “those people” (whoever “those people” happen to be who are different from us in some way). Now, that “dividing wall of hostility” is so high that there is simply no way to climb our way back to God, even if our sinful nature wanted to. So, if there is not divine intervention, humanity would be alienated and separated from God for eternity.

Paul, however, shows that something has indeed changed in our situation. “We know from now on no one according to the flesh.” In other words, we used to regard other people

¹ Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 140-141.

in worldly ways, according to our fallen human standards, but no longer. Why? “If anyone is in Christ—a new creation! The old things have passed away, behold, the new things have come!”

New things? What new things? God reconciled us to Himself! God mended the breach. God ended the separation between Himself and His fallen human creatures! How? Through Jesus Christ! Ephesians 2, Christ “has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph. 2:14–16 ESV). This is exactly what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in our text, namely, that we are new creations in Christ because God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. For in this way God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them.”

You and I and all human creatures are “the world,” as in John 3:16, “In this way God loved the world that He gave His One-of-a-Kind Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” God ended the war between fallen humanity and Himself. God stopped the hostilities. God mended the gap. And He did so “in Christ.”

We are new creations “in Christ” because God reconciled us to Himself “in Christ.” And that reconciliation took place on a cross outside Jerusalem at Golgotha, the Place of a Skull. There, hanging on a cross in cosmic darkness, in agony of body, soul, and spirit, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, became sin for us, even though He didn’t know any sin. No sinful motive ever entered into His mind. Tempted to sin, He didn’t. He is the Sinless One, the Holy

One of God. In 1 Peter 1:19 Christ, the sinless one, is called “the lamb without spot or blemish.” He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

We humans are the ones who broke God’s Law, not Jesus. You and I have sinned against God’s commandments, not Jesus. Yet, on the cross, Jesus was covered with our sins and the sins of all humanity. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6 ESV). The blessed Dr. Luther, preaching on John 1, wrote, “For Holy Scripture declares that the sin of the world does not lie on the world, or St. John’s sin on St. John, or St. Peter’s on Peter; for they are unable to bear it. The sin of the world lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. He steps forth and becomes a vile sinner, yea, sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21), just as if He Himself had committed all the sin of the world from its beginning to its end. This is to be the Lamb’s office, mission, and function.”²

Jesus Christ, nailed to the tree of the cross, bearing all sin of all humanity in His body, was in that moment no longer the Holy One, but the Cursed One. Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” God in Christ did this for humanity—for you—because God is the One who reconciles. Luther, meditating on our Lord’s Passion, wrote, “You cast your sins from yourself and onto Christ when you firmly believe that his wounds and sufferings are your sins, to be borne and paid for by him. . . . St. Peter says, ‘in his body has

² Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 22 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 168.

he borne our sins on the wood of the cross' [1 Pet. 2:24]. St. Paul says, 'God has made him a sinner for us, so that through him we would be made just' [2 Cor. 5:21]. You must stake everything on these and similar verses. The more your conscience torments you, the more tenaciously must you cling to them. . . . If we allow sin to remain in our conscience and try to deal with it there, or if we look at sin in our heart, it will be much too strong for us and will live on forever. But if we behold it resting on Christ and [see it] overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot remain on Christ since it is swallowed up by his resurrection. Now you see no wounds, no pain in him, and no sign of sin. Thus St. Paul declares that 'Christ died for our sin and rose for our justification' [Rom. 4:25]. That is to say, in his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it, but through his resurrection he justifies us and delivers us from all sin, if we believe this."³

We are now new creations in Christ who suffered, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again, reconciling us to God our Father. You are reconciled to your God with sins forgiven because you are "in Christ." Picture it like this. There is a circle. Jesus fills that circle as your Savior and Lord with all His love for you, with His life given into death for you, with His risen Body and Blood for you. Christ takes you and places you into that circle by means of His Word and His Sacrament. In Christ, the Holy Spirit, creates saving faith in your hearts and you receive the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. As new creations in Christ, you have

³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 42: Devotional Writings I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 42 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 12–13.

now become the righteousness of God. Jesus' holy, sinless "status" has been conferred and credited to you.

Because of Jesus Christ, you are reconciled to God. All divisions, conflicts, and hostility between you and the Lord were healed and resolved at Jesus' cross and empty tomb. Your God, Immanuel, through His Word and Sacrament comes to be with you, to dwell with you, and to make His home with you and in you because you are in Christ Jesus. Amen.