

Ambassadors of the Reconciliation

Vicar Lincoln Albrecht—February 17th, 2010—Ash Wednesday

Dear Ambassadors of the Reconciliation,

What does it take to become an ambassador? Years of schooling and instruction? Influential friends and family? Candidates dedicate a lot of effort to obtain these positions. People want to be a US Ambassador.

An unwilling ambassador wouldn't be a very good one. You must properly represent your homeland. You wouldn't pick someone to be a US ambassador who didn't know the words of the national anthem, hated our president and democracy, and publicly burned our flag, would you? They wouldn't be a very good representative of our country. They would probably make things worse. It would be better to have no ambassador at all.

As we consider the ambassadorship of reconciliation which Paul writes about we must confess that we have been bad ambassadors for our God. We were **unlikely** and worse yet, **unwilling ambassadors** of our God.

We were unlikely ambassadors of our God because we didn't have any of the qualifications. We weren't on his side. We didn't love him; we didn't care about him; and we didn't know what he wanted for others. Talk about a bad ambassador. We were the worst.

We weren't on his side because we were on the side of sin, and on the side of the devil, by nature. We were the publican in our Gospel text—with one chief difference. We were outside the temple—completely unaware of our sin. Left to ourselves we were depraved creatures, constantly engaging in one sin, with a wandering eye seeking out the next sin. We were sin. Everything about us was sinful. Every thought. Every word. Every deed. Even when we thought we were doing something nice, we only did it to selfishly receive accolades and praise. Even when we thought we were offering words of encouragement it was only because we expected others to do the same for us. Our selfish and sinful depravity knew no boundaries.

As sinful people our relationship with God was destroyed. Talk about irreconcilable differences. Our differences with God were as stark as they could be. Oil and water. Light and darkness. And even those are weak analogies for our relationship with God. He is love and we are hateful, spiteful, selfish sin. We had no interest in reconciliation. We wanted nothing to do with God.

But it wouldn't have mattered even if we wanted to reconcile. Even if we had begged our God to reconcile our differences, to look past our sinful ways, or selfish words and attitudes, he couldn't have. God cannot change his mind about how he feels about sin. There is no mulligan, no "try better next time"; no "I'll let you off just this one time". Because he is perfect. He demands perfection. Nothing else will suffice. Perfection is the only "good enough" for God.

So how do we reconcile the irreconcilable? Seems like an unanswerable paradox. But for this paradox we find its answer in the greatest paradox in the history of the world. God made flesh. Perfection amidst human depravity. Jesus Christ is the only answer to these irreconcilable differences.

His perfect life—his resistance to the temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil were on our behalf. His innocent death allowed his blood to be shed on our behalf. And God raised him from the dead to put the exclamation point on his time on this earth. Through his resurrection God declared that this Lamb's sacrifice was acceptable in his sight and in our stead. Things are now different between God and us. We are justified. We the once irreconcilable are reconciled fully. Do we feel differently?

In our text Paul was writing to reconciled children of God. People like us. People who already knew what Jesus had done for them. What he had earned them through his precious life blood. Yet, he still writes **Be reconciled to God!** Why? Why would he write this to Christians? After he had written to them on a number of occasions? After he had sent his trusted associates to closely monitor their situation? Why would he tell them to be reconciled to God? Why would he warn them not receive grace in vain?

Because our sinful nature is always struggling against our New Man. Because the sinful world looks appealing. Because the devil's lies seem so logical, so reasonable. That's why we need tonight. We need Ash Wednesday to be reminded of who we were and are. We need to be reconciled to God. Because our sinful nature, the world, and the Devil wants us to think we are ok. To receive the grace of God without any kind of result. They want us to act like the grace of God will always be there to forgive us. To sin like grace abounds. We don't get to live however we want. Our Christian freedom is not given so we can hand over ourselves, body and soul, back to the slavery of sin. And yet we do. We hand over our eyes to lustful glances. We

put our hands in selfish service to our desires. Always looking to take care of number one. We corrupt our tongues with sinful words. We stain our hearts and minds with sinful thoughts about others and ourselves.

So what impact has grace had on your life? What kind of impact should it have in our lives? In our congregation? Sometimes it feels like grace hasn't had enough or any impact. Sometimes we look around and are overwhelmed with our sinful condition.

But our God has already been overwhelmed with our sinful condition to the point of sorrow, even to the point of death. The Son of God suffered the pain and punishment we deserved, in order that through his outstretched arms he might reconcile us to our God. His life, his death, and his resurrection changed our status before God completely. Christ's death didn't change God's mind about how he feels about sin—it changed our status before God, or relationship with him and our sin. God demanded perfection which he received in the blood of his Son.

And so, God has called us to be what we had no desire or ability to be before—his ambassadors. **Undeservedly Beloved Ambassadors of the Reconciliation.**

We are now blessed with the opportunity to witness to others what this reconciliation means. What difference the life, death, and resurrection of Christ makes in our lives. We who once stood before our God as the guilt-ridden publican leave as forgiven and redeemed children of God.

Our ambassadorship doesn't mean that the struggle against the sinful nature, the world, and the devil are distant memories in the rear view mirror of our lives. But we struggle and testify that we are holy and righteous because of the times that Jesus struggled and surpassed temptations. We are ambassadors of what he has done for us, and for the whole world—not of what we ourselves have accomplished.

But this doesn't mean that our own actions don't reflect the reconciliation. A US Ambassador isn't the United States, but at the same time, he or she, represents what our nations believes or stands for. The US Ambassador to Pakistan shows the Pakistani people what it means, what it looks like to be an American.

This holds true for the Christian as well. When people see us they recognize us as Christians. As they look at us, they learn through experience what it means, what it looks like to be a Christian. And in this way God makes his appeal to others to repentance. Through you and I, our God works to encourage others to be reconciled to him.

As people live alongside, visit with, or even just observe us, they will see that we live a different kind of life. One that flees from sin. One that knows what this reconciliation means not only to us but the whole world. One that receives the gift of God's grace with great results.

Because of this gracious reconciliation we strive to work in service of our God. This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote the Philippians and encouraged them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. It is not that they could work hard to earn their salvation. They couldn't, and we cannot work to become ambassadors. We didn't and couldn't take that first step towards reconciliation.

But we can strive to take advantage of this reconciliation, our salvation. We have many opportunities to exercise our faith among others who know nothing of the favor of the LORD. We can preach the WORD clearly, explain the plan of salvation simply, and pray that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to receive his grace with results. And we offer our own lives as examples for them. Showing them how we have put our talents to work in the kingdom of God, and not burying them in the ground. We can show them our abundant fruits of faith. Not boasting about ourselves, but boasting in Christ. Because he is the only reason any of this is possible. He is the only reason we have our positions as ambassadors of the reconciliation.

God be praised that he sent his Son to earn us this position in his kingdom. We cannot obtain it with years of schooling, or by knowing the right people, yet this ambassadorship is much more valuable and important than a US ambassadorship. Consider the great privilege God has extended to you in being his ambassadors of reconciliation. God be praised that he has sent his Holy Spirit into your lives so that you didn't reject the reconciliation he offered through his Son. God be praised that he gives us so many opportunities to proclaim the message of his reconciliation through thought, word, and deed.

So, ambassadors of Christ go out! Proclaim the favorable times! Proclaim that your God has heard your cries for his grace! Demonstrate that you are forgiven children, undeservedly beloved ambassadors of the reconciliation. AMEN.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as ambassadors you were called to peace. Amen.