

## **“Four R’s of Reconciliation”**

**Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, March 10, 2013**

### **Old Testament Lesson – Psalm 32:1-7 New Testament Lesson - 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

For the 18<sup>th</sup> century clergyman John Wesley, teaching school in Savannah was at one time among his many jobs in the community.<sup>1</sup> One day, another teacher, Mr. Delamott, came to Wesley concerned that some of the boys in Delamott’s class were laughing at and ridiculing other students who didn’t wear socks and shoes to school. Delamott said he was out of ideas for addressing what he considered to be “a growing evil” in his schoolroom. Wesley told him he thought he could “cure it,” adding, “If you will take care of my (class) next week, I will take care of yours,” which Delamott readily agreed to do.

On Monday morning, Wesley entered Delamott’s class wearing neither socks nor shoes. “The children looked with surprise,” said Wesley, “first at me, and then at each other. I took no notice,” he said, “but kept them to their work. I soon observed, however, that those who were without stockings (what he called socks) and shoes, began to gather courage ... now (that) they had the master on their side.”

Wesley did the same every day during the week and before long several of those who used to wear socks and shoes came to school without them. “Thus,” reported Wesley, “the evil was securely cured!” Wesley had come down to the level of the most needy, and in doing that, he elevated everyone – regardless of their past behavior or their economic standing.

In our New Testament lesson, we hear about how Christ came down to the level of the most needy, in order to elevate everyone – regardless of our past behavior or our economic or social standing. Paul says, “For our sake, (God) made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In Jesus Christ, we have all been given a special job...to become the righteousness of God....a special job in the community, not unlike Wesley’s job as teacher of students, and healer of rifts, or schisms or discord – whatever you call it when people are at odds with each other, and go against each other or against the way God would have things.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Pilkington, “Annotation to Wesley's Journal,” London Quarterly and Holborn Review, 177, (October 1953): 269.

And the job title that Paul gives for this special assignment is: "Ambassador for Christ."

Well, if we've got a new job, we'd better figure out what that job is, what the job responsibilities are, and what skill-set or training we might need to do the job? But Paul does not come right out and tell us this, does he? It's kind of like a help-wanted ad where we need to read between the lines. Paul's ad for Ambassadors says "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away; ... everything has become new!" New creation – could that be a hint as to what the job responsibilities are? What is it that brings about something new in our relationships or in our lives?

(Contemp: Here's where you get to fill in the blank based on your experience and knowledge.) Think for a moment: what brings about change or makes room for something new in life or between people?

Think about your own relationships and what has had them get better and think about what has had them get worse. What about a new job, or deciding to take a challenging class in school, or go out for a sports team, or join a club or start a hobby –looking back on your life, what did it take for you to do those things, to step up to a new challenge/or to overcome an old difficulty or trouble area? Remembering the past can be a great training exercise for creating something new in the future. Whatever it was that brought about something new in your life, chances are that it took forgiveness, or inspiration, or a new way of looking at things – a vision for what's possible.

And we see this in what Paul says about being an Ambassador for Christ. "In Christ," says Paul, "God was reconciling the world to himself, <http://us.mg204.mail.yahoo.com/neo/> not counting their trespasses against them (but rather forgiving them), and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

So, our responsibility as an Ambassador for Christ, is to carry the message of God's forgiveness and God's reconciling love to the world, which of course includes those we love, to the people we meet, our colleagues at work, or other students at school, and to the community you live in – working on behalf of Christ to bring God's message of love and acceptance; that's our job responsibility.

Another thing that's helpful to know before accepting any new job is what's the purpose of the job. I mean, yes, we know what to do – forgive ourselves and others for what's in the past and create something new in its place – but to what purpose? What is supposed to come from all this? What's the market opportunity, if you will, that's presenting itself? Where is the need that is to be filled?

Well, according to Paul, it has something to do with reassessing where God is and where the world is? Paul says that "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself." So we can conclude that there's some rift, or schism or discord between God and the world that needs to be healed. That's the purpose of our Ambassadorship – to be instrumental in reversing humankind's fall from grace by overcoming our own evil and misguided ways and being reconciled with God and one another, in the most loving and faithful way possible.

But, do we have what it takes to stay clear of the great divide between us and God, to really look at ourselves and make some improvements in our performance – and I don't mean our job performance at work or school, but throughout all of life?

Fast Company magazine<sup>2</sup> tells about an executive named Mike who was dismissive and offensive to everyone, even mouthing off to his CEO. But he was delivering results, and making more than \$4 million a year. So his executive coach, Marshall Goldsmith, had a tough job to perform, since he couldn't challenge Mike's performance. Instead, he sat Mike down and said, "I can't help you make more money; you're already making a lot. But let's talk about your ego. How do you treat people at home?" Mike insisted that he was totally different outside the office – "a pussycat." So they called his wife, and when she finally stopped laughing about what Mike said about himself she confirmed that Mike was a jerk at home, too. Then he got his two kids on the line, and they agreed with their mother. Goldsmith asked Mike, "Do you really want to have a funeral that no one attends other than for business reasons?" Mike thought for a minute and then said, "I'm going to change .... I'm going to change because I have two sons, and if they were receiving this same feedback from you in 20 years, I'd be ashamed to be their father."

How can we stay clear of the great divide between us and God? We just need an executive coach like Marshall Goldsmith to swoop into our lives and turn things around. Or, we could just look to Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul, having looked to Christ during his "come to Jesus" moment, says, "We regard no one from a human point of view; because <http://us.mg204.mail.yahoo.com/neo/> even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, <http://us.mg204.mail.yahoo.com/neo/> we know him no longer in that way."

Christ allows us to overcome our human failings and rise to our true promise as God's instruments for creating the sweet sounds of love and reconciliation. In Christ, we have what it takes to be Ambassadors for Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Fast Company, October 2003.

And that means, like that executive named Mike, we have what it takes to accept God's job offer to be Ambassadors for Christ, by allowing Christ to lead us and lift us up to new ways of being – regardless of our past behavior. In Christ, God comes down to our level, and in that, we are elevated beyond our human limitations. In Christ, we are reunited with God and with all of humanity, and particularly with our loved ones if they, too, are open to the new creation God promises us.

It's our choice whether to live into the promises of God, to take on the job of becoming an Ambassador for Christ; Or we can remain slaves to sin and our misguided ways.

If you're interested in taking on this job for Christ, in carrying the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us, try doing what Joanne Lynn and Joan Harrold recommend in their book the "Handbook for Mortals"<sup>3</sup> – try the Four R's of Reconciliation, which are printed on page 4 in your bulletin, at the bottom.

No. 1, Remembering. Take time to reflect on your life and its events. What are your past accomplishments? What is left undone? What should be forgotten and left behind?

No. 2, Reassessing. Take time to see your life as a whole. You may ask what your life has added up to so far, or who you really have become. You might share your thoughts with those who know and love you, make sure you're being a little more honest in your self assessment than was the executive named Mike we just heard about.

No. 3, Reconciling. Be at peace with yourself and your imperfections and the imperfections of others. God can use even our weakness and failings if we repent and seek to do the next right thing.

And No. 4, Reuniting. Be at peace with those you love.... Come together with family and friends, enjoy each other's company in the spirit of love and reconciliation.

Consider this your on-the-job training as an Ambassador for Christ – the Four R's of Reconciliation: Remembering the past, Reassessing your life, Reconciling with imperfections – yours and other people's – and Reuniting with those you love.

And then take that same spirit of reconciliation with you into the world – as a fully trained, and highly equipped Ambassador for Christ. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 30.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

From the beginning, there was beauty in the ordinary and splendor in the commonplace. Each grain of sand, each willowy feather, carried the mark of your touch, O God.

Strike a rock and the river of life nourishes doubting hearts. Tap a tree and sweetness flows to ease winter burdens.

Into our world, where we often ignore the common and pass by the ordinary, you sent Jesus. He showed us how to tap our experiences so we might see God's blessings in lost coins, widow's mites, narrow doors and mustard seeds.

He leads us in Lent to take on acts of charity and develop eyes to see the holy in the ordinary.

Jesus walks with us as we let go of sin and separation. Stir up in us concern for others, O God, that in serving them we may be close to Christ, who is our servant Lord.

Especially we pray your closeness upon those who are ravaged by disease... victims of prejudice... the cynical who mock your love... the hungry and homeless... all who give of themselves in serving others...

It was in service to others and obedience to God that you came to live among us, leading us and inspiring us, befriending us and saving us, teaching us and praying for us, and giving to us the prayer that sets all things right between God and the World, the prayer we pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.