

Message: Reconciliation

In the epistle reading this morning we read "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself." That was from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. In the King James version that same line reads: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

That is the version that I memorized back when I was a child in Sunday School, or Vacation Bible School. Memorization was considered important back then, and I happened to be good at it. I was proud of the gold stars next to my name. That was the goal - to earn as many gold stars as possible. It was years later before I started to think about what this phrase might mean. 'God was in Christ.'

Today that speaks to me. It helps me with my understanding of the trinity (father, son, and holy spirit), and with my understanding of who Jesus was. I see Jesus as very human as he lived his life among people. "Once we knew Christ from a human point of view." we read. But God dwelt within Jesus; so much so that people who knew him saw God's Spirit within. In Jesus people saw their Lord and Saviour, the Christ. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. Reconcil, bring back together that which has been broken - our relationship with God, with one another, with the world

Broken - separated - lost - alone. I have heard that is a definition for sin. Anything that separates us from God.

The first Commandment: Love God. The second: Love others.

But we are human. We make mistakes. We become separated from those we love the most. Our gospel lesson for today was about that type of separation - the separation within a family.

Jesus was a master storyteller. This is one of his best remembered and much loved stories. I saw a movie about the life of Christ once, probably when I was not much older than Sunday School age. In it Jesus stood in front of the crowd dressed in a white robe, exuding calmness and peace, and spoke these words almost exactly as they are recorded in the gospel by Luke. "There was a man who had two sons ..." I timed myself as I read it aloud this week. It took me under four minutes. I read recently that it probably took Jesus a half hour, or more, to tell a story as he interacted with the crowd.

"There was a man who had two sons..." "Lucky man. Two boys." "What, only two." And the women and girls at the gathering would be wondering in their groups "What about his wife?" "Were there no girls?" And Jesus gets their attention again: "Yes, there was a mother, of course. And girls. And a little brother. But this story is about the two older boys. They are almost

grown-up. The younger of these two, no not the toddler, the younger of the two older brothers was a restless sort, always hanging around the market place listening to travelers."

"Yea, I know. I have a son like that." "Me too. Let him out of my sight and he's off."

"Big dreams - my boy has all these dreams of what he'd like to do."

"Yes, that's it exactly. This boy went to his father and asked..."

Remember this is in the open air. Perhaps by the sea of Galilee. "He asked ..." Just then an eagle sweeps from the sky and grabs a fish from the water and takes off. Everybody has to watch, then they give their attention back to Jesus:

"What did he asked his father?"

"He asked for his share of the inheritance ..."

So the story goes on, people asking questions, interacting, and identifying with the characters in the story: the impulsive boy, the generous father, the heartbroken mother, the jealous older brother.

The point is, this is a story of brokenness. Brokenness within a family (the modern word is dysfunctional a dysfunctional family), but it could just as easily be dysfunction and brokenness within any group a club or team, a community, a church, or a nation when one person or small group wants to do things differently and not go along with the status quo.

We remember and love this story so much because we all have experienced it in some way, as families or groups are broken and torn apart. There are no perfect families; no perfect church; or communities. We are individuals. We have our individual personalities, wants and needs. Some of us are steady, reliable workers. Others are idea people, who perhaps have problems following through. Some are cautious worriers; others anxious to get started. So there are bound to be conflicts. Add to this the past baggage we all carry (I see my big sister as bossy; she sees herself as loaded down with responsibility she sees me as impractical; I feel unappreciated; and our younger sister sees her role as peacemaker, not taking sides, avoiding conflict. We love each other but it is probably good that we live in different provinces and only see each other for a week or so at a time, once a year.)

We identify with the story the problems that tear us apart and separate us. But where is the reconciliation. Where can we say 'I was lost but have been found'?

Our reading from Corinthians says that we should regard no one from a human point

of view, for in Christ there is a new creation. A new creation!! No longer the oldest brother (or sister), toiling away and burdened with responsibility. No longer the forgotten middle child who feels she has to break away to be herself, and then feels the separation and the guilt. No longer the voiceless one, the mother who accepts, the sister who tries to keep the peace. A new creation, freed from the past, healed and reconciled.

In Christ we see the love of God shining through, reconciling the world to God. In our own hearts we need to find that love of God freely given, accepting us as we are, with all our baggage, warts and all. We need to experience it in ourselves, and to seek it out in others, to see each one as a child of God, and be reconciled one to another and to God. We need to let God's Spirit enter us, and shine through us, and make us a new creation.

And when we feel that love, that patient, endless love, may we find healing, strength and joy. Then, how can we keep from singing.