

Text: *2 Corinthians 5:18-20* All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. . . and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors.

CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

Some years ago, after I had retired from the University of West Florida, I was spending a winter semester in Kaifeng China teaching comparative English governments at the University of Kaifeng. Kaifeng is the old capitol of China during the dynasty of the Judges. It was not just Israel that went through a period of rule by Judges. The city is very old and has a metropolitan population of around five million. Making it a middle sized city by Chinese standards. Soon after I got there I walked along one of the downtown streets and saw a huge brick building with a cross on it. The church was a cross between a Midwestern courthouse and a 1930s high school. Almost Methodist in appearance! A woman was sweeping the steps at the front of the church and I asked her if she spoke English, she replied that she did, and I then asked her the inevitable American question, "what denomination is your church?" She replied "Denomination? No denomination, we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified." So in only ten words she gave me a lesson in both humility and theology. The lesson in humility was that, in spite of living in various cultures, I still carried with me the notion that the American way was the norm. A lesson in theology, reminding me that the essence of Christianity is God's gift of his Son on the reconciling cross.

St. Paul tells us that we are the ambassadors to the world charged with sharing the message of reconciliation. Imagine for a moment that we are workers in the department of foreign affairs of Christianity. And very special workers at that: Ambassadors, at the top of the organization! No wonder World Missions is so important in the Episcopal Church!

Reconciliation is the restoration of harmony – in the case of Christianity, restoring harmony between God and humankind. This is the goal of World Missions. How this restoration comes about is the story of faith made real through action.

Sometimes the action seems small, but the effect can be community changing. Our Diocese sponsors a water ministry. Think about what clean water means, or what the lack of clean water means. Compare your home faucet with that of Flint, Michigan. When you turn your tap you trust the water to be healthy and reasonably pure. Flint's water will destroy the mental growth of children and sicken adults. Now, place yourself in one of our target countries, where, especially in the more rural areas, no safe water source exists. Infant death toll is high, water borne diseases endemic. Helping those communities to achieve healthy water supplies is part of reconciliation. Re-establishing harmony between the environment and the people so that health is transformed is an act of bringing people to Jesus.

In Africa, Latin America and in Native American lands, education projects are frequently the focus of the Episcopal Church in general and of our Diocese in particular. Education is such a key tool in the toolbox of reconciliation. It rescues girls and minorities from repression, it opens up economic opportunities, and it builds a Jesus foundation for spiritual development. Episcopalian education projects provides the basis for meaningful citizenship, which may well be a source of peace in many communities.

Finally, wherever you find a mission effort, you find worship services. These services make clear the pathway to reconciliation. This reconciliation is essential for the healing of ethnic strife and the ending of cultural wars through building tolerance for diversity. Tolerance that comes from the application of God's love, realized through human action; the finest kind of ambassadorial work.

The last stanza from Carl Sandburg's poem *The People will Live On* catches the need for mission.

In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
The people march.
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
Keeps, the people march:
Where to? What next?

World missions answer those questions. Where to? To a community of believers. What next? A time of reconciliation. Yes, St. Paul, we all are ambassadors, indeed. Amen