

Reconciliation

Psalm 31:1-5
II Corinthians 5:16-21

Psalm 31 is yet another prayer for deliverance. King David wrote it, as he did many of the others in the category. And as with so many of them, scholars disagree about whether its proximate cause was a deathly illness or betrayal by personal enemies. As I read through their arguments I experienced the MEGO phenomenon. MEGO is an acronym that stands for My Eyes Glaze Over. MEGO. I realized that I did not care whether David had recovered from yet another illness or from betrayal at the hands of yet another enemy. I did not care because the message we can gain from this psalm remains the same no matter what. We find that message aptly communicated in verses one through five, culminating with a wonderful crescendo at the very end: "Into thy hands I commit my spirit," David writes, "thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

We too may commit our spirits to God, for God has redeemed us. Whether David had been sick or sick to his stomach at the treatment he'd received from supposed allies, he knew to throw himself into God's arms. And he could do so because God had already redeemed him. According to the Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, redemption literally means buying back. In biblical usage, redemption happens when the people find themselves in bondage. God then buys their freedom. In the Old Testament redemption is often seen in connection with the

Children of Israel returning from slavery and exile. The prophets interpret this as God redeeming the people and restoring the blessings of the covenant: land, descendants, freedom to worship God.

II Corinthians 5:16-21 contains the Apostle Paul's understanding of redemption—though the word does not actually appear in the passage. Paul opens by saying he once saw Jesus as a human being but no longer does. Now he sees him as the Messiah who came into this world to die on the cross. “Therefore,” Paul continues, “if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation; the old has passed away, the new has come.” We need to unpack this characteristically dense Pauline sentence. The whole of his thought turns on the phrase “in Christ”. What does it mean to be in Christ? It means to have faith in him as the Savior. It means to have a living relationship with him. It means to trust that he lives and that he loves us. It means more than this, but this summary will do for our purposes today.

When we are in Christ the old passes away; the new comes. Paul asserts we become a new creation. We remain sinners. In a couple of verses Paul will write that for those in Christ “God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...” We still trespass. We still sin. Yet we somehow get changed in a profound manner. Perhaps the key to understanding this lies in the word reconciling. Reconciliation is the fact—and the ministry—of restoring broken relationships. It is Jacob and Esau embracing after years of intrigue and conflict. It is David and his best friend Jonathon overcoming all the forces at King Saul's court

trying to pull them apart. It is the Prodigal Son returning home to his father.

Commentator Murray Harris writes, “Reconciliation is not some polite ignoring or reduction in hostility but rather its total removal.” The total removal of hostility.

Reconciliation comes to us as a gift from God. And he accomplished it by taking the action Paul puts at the very end of our passage. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus, the son of God, the sinless one, became the sin offering. He died on the cross despite the fact he did not deserve it. This reflects yet another reconfiguration of an Old Testament reality. The sin offerings made first in the camp of the Israelites during the Exodus, and continued right on through the Second Temple in Jerusalem, required animal sacrifice. Generally speaking, the bigger the sin the bigger the animal called for by the law. And those animals needed to be spotless, without blemish. Jesus became the perfect offering without blemish, who as the Messiah, was a big enough animal—if you will—to take away the sins of the world.

Paul does not write his points in the following order, but it might help us to understand these six verses: We are sinners. God requires sacrifice for forgiveness of sin. Jesus became the once-for-all-time offering to pay for our sins. He redeems us. When we become “in Christ” his redemption takes root in us. We become new creations. As he reconciles us to himself, so we can perform the ministry of reconciliation with one another.

The Christian group Jars of Clay recorded a song that puts emotional flesh on these bones. Its title is *Worlds Apart*, referring to our status with Jesus before we become “in Christ”. It opens with the line, “I’m the only one to blame for this.” It speaks of selfish pride and trying to turn away from a world filled with pain and hate, “and not become another nail to pierce the skin of the one who loves more deeply than the oceans, more abundantly than the tears of a world embracing every heartbreak.” The bridge of the tune asks, “Did you really have to die for me?” The next verses admit that he did. The lyric concludes with, “Steal my heart and take the pain, take the selfish, take the weak, and all the things I cannot hide...Take my world apart, take my world apart. And I pray, and I pray, and I pray, take my world apart.”

From being worlds apart, Jesus reconciled us to himself by taking our world apart, by changing us into new beings. He must take our worlds apart in order to put us back together as his newly redeemed people. Only then can we truly be reconciled—to him and to one another. With whom do you need to be reconciled? Does it seem impossible? Have too many angry words been posted or spoken? Have too many months or years passed? None of it matters. God has already take care of it. Be reconciled to Jesus, and let your new being pursue reconciliation—the total removal of hostility—with your brother and sister sinners.

Andy Van Slyke was an all-star outfielder for the Cardinals and Pirates. He is also a sincere Christian who when he could served as a sponsor for our senior high youth group in suburban St. Louis. Lisa, one of our students, was leading a Bible

study on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The young woman got to the verse where it says, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and make your gift." Andy stood up and said, "I gotta go."

We did not see him again until the team returned from a road trip some two weeks later. He was always happy and full of wisecracks, but this Sunday evening he was radiant. He told us he and his wife Sarah argued before he came to youth group the time before. They'd been arguing about this same thing for years. He knew he was *right*. She was *wrong*. But then Lisa read that thing about dropping everything and getting reconciled. Andy saw the connection to their lives and put it into practice.

With whom do you need to be reconciled? If you are in Christ you can trust that the Lamb of God will redeem you. If you are in Christ you can trust that the God who delivered David will deliver you and your relationships. Be reconciled to God and to one another. If you have something against anybody—if they have against you—drop everything else. Go to your brother and/or sister. Commit your spirit to God and God *will* help make reconciliation happen.