

MAKING TODAY COUNT

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

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(with material from Wendy Joyner, used by permission)

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SCRIPTURE

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ¹As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 NRSV).

MESSAGE

When I was a young person, I was certain that when I grew up things would be better, easier, and make more sense than they did when I was a child. However, reality proved to be far different from expectation. Waiting for tomorrow to bring the final level of maturity, wisdom, or clarity is useless because life doesn’t work that way. Life is a process of growth, and it begins wherever we find ourselves in a particular moment.

Of course, there are those who always want to put things off until tomorrow. Many Americans struggle with procrastination. They could use some help. Somebody asked me the other day if there was rehab for procrastinators. I said, “Yes, but they haven’t gotten around to opening yet.”

It seems like we are always looking forward to the next thing in life, hoping that will

bring us what we are missing in the present. But if we go through life wishing for tomorrow then we will miss out on what we could have received today. Each stage of life has a gift but if we wish too hard for the next stage of life we will miss the gifts being offered today.

This is true of life in general but it is especially true of the life of faith. We have thoughts like this: “When things around me settle down, my faith will be stronger. When I reach this stage in life I can be more disciplined in my prayer life. When I retire, I will be able to do more. When I get healthy I can study the Bible. If I can just take care of all these projects I got going on then I can focus on spiritual things.” The list goes on and on. It's easy for me to set my eyes on the future and believe that transformation will take place later on in life. Yet, by doing so, I miss the gifts and the opportunities that are available to me in the present. Growth in the life of faith should never be postponed to a later or more ideal time. God calls us to begin anew each day. And so we need to make today count.

The Bible reminds us of the truth that none of us are promised tomorrow. We are encouraged to take a snapshot in time, and to look at our relationship with God in the light of today. We are to respond to God's call today. The apostle Paul understood the need for our reconciliation with God, and he communicated it with a sense of urgency. Paul calls for us to “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). Paul recognized our need to receive the good news of forgiveness in Christ, and to let it take root in our hearts. He knew the difference that this reconciliation would make in our lives. The good news of the Gospel is that we will not only be put in right relationship with God, but also be in right relationship with one another. The apostle Paul says, in effect, “Don't wait! See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation! Today is the day to make sure your heart is right with your Maker and that you live in peace with one another” (based on 6:2).

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, especially in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, he makes a big deal about reconciliation. He reminds us that the very heart of his ministry and the most important calling for Christians is reconciliation with God, for that is in fact what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. So he illustrates what he and his fellow travelers have been willing to do, and the hardships they have been willing to endure, so that this message and ministry might be carried out. He makes it very clear that there must be no obstacle to bringing the clarity of the good news of God's reconciling love to the world.

What is reconciliation? Some say that it simply means making friends. And that is true so far as it goes. But in everyday life we tend to make friends with people we like and who like us. Paul would say that falls way short of what he means by reconciliation.

If we say it means making friends with people you do not like and who do not like you, then I think he would say we are getting closer but are not quite there yet. Reconciliation is the doing away of an enmity, the bridging over of a quarrel. It implies that the parties being reconciled were formerly hostile to one another. The Bible is quite blunt. Because of sin we are enemies of God and subsequently we are at odds with each other (Rom 5:10; Col 1:21; Jas 4:4). Therefore, we are in need of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a gift from God, intended for the whole world. The trouble with contemporary conversations about reconciliation is that we somehow believe reconciliation is a human enterprise. We believe we can accomplish this reconciliation in and of ourselves. We think that nations, peoples, races and communities can of themselves bring about reconciliation in and of themselves. According to Paul, God has already established the foundation for this reconciliation in Christ.

Roberto L. Gómez makes this observation:

During World War II, the German air force bombed the city of Coventry in England and destroyed the city's electric power station. Several days later the German air force bombed Coventry's cathedral. Without electric power, the firefighters could not operate the water pumps. The people of Coventry watched their magnificent cathedral burn to the ground. After the war, the people of Coventry built a glorious new cathedral next to the ruins of their old cathedral. In the space of the old cathedral there is a statue of a man and a woman kneeling, facing and embracing each other. The statue is called *Reconciliation*. The people of Coventry invited Christians from Germany to join them for a service of reconciliation and for the dedication of the statue. God's grace truly had a part in bringing together these two former enemies. Such is God's grace revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, with power to overcome hatred, bigotry, broken trust, anger, and other divisive obstacles between God's children.

God has established the foundation for reconciliation in Christ. What is more, the motivation for this is love. For those of you who trust in Christ, think of what you once were before Christ's power laid hold of you. Wouldn't you say something like, "I was a person whose heart rebelled against God. I turned against God deliberately and defiantly. The good he wanted me to do I did not do. The evil he told me to avoid I kept on doing. I was trapped. There was no way out"? Wasn't that your condition? It certainly was mine.

Little did you know that Someone loved you then. You had no idea that you had been

given to Jesus Christ by God the Father – before the foundation of the world – to save and keep. Because he loved you Jesus came into the world, born of the virgin Mary. He lived the righteous life you failed to live, but he did it in your place, and on the cross he made an atonement for your sins, paying the price of your redemption. Because he loved you he gave himself for you, tasting death for you, and on the third day rising from the dead to be your Shepherd King.

Now ascended to the right hand of God with all authority in heaven and earth he lives for you – still because he loves you. Then in his mercy, through all the plans of his providence, at some time in your life, he saved you by sending the regenerating Holy Spirit into your life and giving you a new birth. It was his love alone that made him do it. It was nothing in you that forced his hand.

Today he is keeping you, again, because he loves you. He is working in all things for your good, he is providing all your needs so richly, because he loves you. He is making all grace always abound to you, because he loves you. He loves you. He loves me. He loves us.

We are indeed saved by God when we first receive God's gift of love and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, but God is also at work in us each day that we seek to follow Christ. This message is for new believers, long-time believers, and potential believers. Now is the day of our salvation! If we spend our lives waiting to understand it all or waiting to be more certain, we will never come to fully embrace the good news of the Gospel. If we wait until life settles down into a certain predictable pattern so that we can be more obedient or more faithful, we will be waiting for a day that might never come. The life of faith is a journey. We have to begin here. We are offered the opportunity to embrace God's offer of reconciliation today. We are called to embrace the good news of Jesus' death on the cross, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21).

Are there things in our lives that we need to be dealing with openly and honestly, yet we keep putting them off? Is God calling us to service, but we persist in thinking that it will wait until a later chapter in our lives? Do we think that we will repair a broken family relationship sometime in the future, rather than taking a risk and working toward forgiveness now? Are we waiting for certainty, failing to remember that “now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face” (1 Cor 13:12)? The invitation is simple. Invite God’s reconciling power into your life today.