

Sermon

Ambassadors of Reconciliation

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, October 31, 2021

All Saints

Prayer for Illumination:

“Though I may speak with bravest fire and have the words to all inspire — but have not love — my words are vain as sounding brass and hopeless gain.

Come Spirit Come, our lives control. Our Spirits long to be made whole. Let inward love guide every deed. By this we worship and are freed.”¹

Psa. 146:1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

*Psa. 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.*

*Psa. 146:5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,*

*6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;*

who keeps faith forever;

*7 who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.*

¹ Hal Hopson, 1972. Hope Publishing. (First and third stanzas)

*The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*Psa. 146:10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD!*

2Cor. 5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

I. I will be brief in my remarks today given the many important aspects of ministry which we are celebrating in worship this Lord’s Day.

‘Preach the gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words.’

A. These words — commonly and, probably erroneously attributed to St. Francis of Assisi,

Have become part of the lexicon of Xn in the 21st century. [b. 1181 or 1182 – d. 3 October 1226)]

- B. Though they appear attributed to St. Francis on posters, tweets, blogs, and bumper-stickers...
 - 1. They appear in *none* of the known writings of Francis, nor of his immediate followers/ biographers for 800 years.²****
- C. And yet, I believe this sentence has captured the imagination of many in our generation, precisely because it offered a counterpoint to the excessive wordiness and argumentative nature of Christianity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.**

- II. I do not need to spend a lot of time reminding us of the highly fragmented world in which we live — with seemingly *everyone* so quick to take offense and so quick to respond with an attack of our own.
 - A. Let us not think that this is an entirely new circumstance for the church and for people of faith.**
 - B. The 16th Century Dutch theologian Erasmus wrote of his own fractious culture:****

Finally, peace rests largely in the fact of desiring it with all of our soul. “. . .

Indeed, those who desire [peace] grasp every occasion which is favorable to it. They disregard certain justified claims, smooth over difficulties which oppose it, even endure disagreeable things in order to save that great good which is peace.

² He did write, in his Rule of 1221, that 'All the Friars... should preach by their deeds,' and 'It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching,'

Unfortunately, it is the opposite that happens. We see today—I will not wear myself out repeating it—[people] carefully seeking excuses for conflict. They suppress and hide everything that might maintain peace; They exaggerate excessively, and to the point of exasperation, everything that would lead to an outbreak of hostility.”

C. The Apostle Paul, too, was writing to a highly polarized and irritable community in Corinth when he penned today’s passage.

2Cor. 5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;

III. Today we remember some of the Saints whose lives have embodied this gospel of reconciliation.

- A. Ordinary people, who in simple ways, made extraordinary impacts on us.**
- B. As we read our necrology, may we be truly thankful for all the saints who from their labors rest.**

IV. We also come to the Table of our Lord to be reminded that he made great sacrifice in order to reconcile us to God and to one another.

A. The apostle Paul writes in Romans about this:

Rom. 5:6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9

... 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

B. Long tradition has used the following prayer in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper:

*We do not presume to come to this your Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your Table. But you are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.*³

V. And we mark today with our Commissioning of Be The Hands the coming weeks in which we will be intentional about serving God a “ambassadors of God’s reconciliation.”

A. And we do that following the example of the saints who came before and have shown us what good and faithful discipleship looks like.

B. We do that in the sentiment ascribed to St. Francis

'Preach the gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words.'

³ The *Book of Common Prayer* 1979 p.338.