

Planting Hope: Justice for All 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

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Covid has brought many changes in our homes and in our communities, in our nation and in our world. It seems there is an atmosphere of anger that has surfaced. It doesn't take much to fuel the fires of disagreement. I happen to live in School District 112. You may not recognize that school district until it was on the national news. Recently at a District 112 School Board meeting a fight broke out due to the disagreement of several people attending the meeting. It was a sad story of the verbal and physical display of anger over disagreements and how deep the divide continues to be a part of our culture. That divide is evidence of our brokenness. We are a broken nation and we are broken people.

Our brokenness effects our relationships with each other and with God. I can't imagine anyone truly enjoying being part of a broken relationship. And neither can God. In our reading from 2 Corinthians we are once again reminded there is a way to mend the brokenness in our relationships. It is done through reconciliation. That reconciliation is grounded in God's love. God's love for you and for the other. Our reading today is from 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (The Message Bible).

All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

A person could feel overwhelmed when watching the news or reading about all the divisiveness being

played out through anger, hate, prejudice, and war. Unfortunately, this is nothing new in our world. In fact, it has been going on for thousands of years.

Take Jonah, for instance. Jonah, the prophet in the Old Testament that spent a little time in the stomach of a VERY large fish. The story goes that God asked Jonah to go to the town of Ninevah and tell them that they needed to clean up their act, and if they didn't they were going to be destroyed. Guess what? Jonah WANTED them to be destroyed. He hated... he loathed the Ninevites. Going to help them was the last thing he wanted to do! He ran from God, got swallowed up by a BIG fish, then spit out. After that experience, he decided to do as God suggested. He headed to Ninevah, hoping they would not listen.

Did I mention how much he hated the Ninevites? The thing is, Jonah probably didn't even know a single Ninevite. He had heard about them and their ways, so he pre-judged them. His hate and anger toward them was based on what he had heard. And he made the decision that he didn't want anything good for them. Reconciliation was the furthest thing from his mind. He did not want them to experience the mercy of God. And when God did show the Ninevites mercy, it made Jonah even more furious!

It seems many of us have had the same feelings that Jonah had. We judge others by what we think we know about them and our anger towards them feels righteous. But how many of those we pre-judge have we actually sat down with and heard their story? There is almost resistance to work towards reconciliation. Instead, we want to gather together with those we agree with and keep those we don't at bay.

The lines of division are clear, and the brokenness of relationships has moved us away from reconciliation toward an attitude of divisiveness. I think about how deeply suspicious, even distrustful we can be these days. We aren't talking to our neighbors like we used to; maybe because we see a sign for a conservative or a liberal political candidate in their yard with whom we disagree.

My friend used to walk with one of her neighbors every morning. My friend put up a political sign in her yard. The very next day, her neighbor didn't show up for their walk. When my friend walked over to her neighbor's house she saw that a bigger sign from the

“other” political party was displayed in her neighbor’s yard. They haven’t spoken since.

Have you ever found yourself hesitant to engage in conversations with someone because you may “get into it” with them about their views on vaccines or global warming, religion or politics? It is amazing how quickly we can be suspicious of someone because of their skin color, religion, country, or gender. It is easy to judge others for their career choice, education level, sexual orientation, political bent, etc.

And what about those we do know, our friends, our families; we may find ourselves being on guard when it comes to certain topics or conversations. So we don’t have honest conversations because we are afraid of what might happen if we say something that might set someone off in an angry tirade. And if we do say how we really feel, it can push our loved ones away, and create a divide that is painful and hurtful, a broken relationship that is in need of reconciliation.

However, reconciliation isn’t always easy. It is no secret that reconciliation takes work...hard work. That work starts with you and with me. We can ask ourselves a few hard questions; digging deep inside and asking, “How have I been responsible for the divides that surround me? What are my biases?” We’re not all that great at owning our role in all this. We want to blame others. It’s all “their fault.” It can be hard for us to examine our own biases, and yet it can be quite awakening when we discover them.

As we begin the work and take an honest look at our own prejudices, we can then ask this question: “Do I really know all there is to know about a person or a group of people based on their religion, politics, skin color, status, education, background, their residence, their career, _____?” (you fill in the blank).

Of course not! The answer is no. We can’t know all there is to know about another person. So how can we judge them? How can we hate them? It doesn’t make sense when you think about it.

The heart of this really isn’t about the other person or group of people. It is about you and me. It is how we see ourselves. How do you see yourself? Do you see a beautiful, beloved child of God? Have you ever looked at yourself in a mirror and said, “You are a beloved child of God and I love you!” But we need to start with ourselves.

Here’s the thing... if you can’t see yourself as God’s precious, beloved child, then you aren’t able to see another person as God’s child. And if we can’t see

ourselves and others as God’s children, then our biases, our judgments, our prejudices will continue without reconciliation and will continue to harbor brokenness.

Reconciliation begins with loving ourselves as children of God.

God has chosen you. You are a beloved child of God, forever. That deep love of God is the same for each person. God has created every single living thing on earth. And God loves it all, always, that includes you, and each and every person in this world. We are all God’s children. When we can see another person how God sees them, then we begin to see others differently.

Imagine if we all saw others the way God sees us, through the eyes of love, not gender, not race, not religion, not politics, but just love. Then maybe we can begin to see differently... each person uniquely and beautifully made. Watch this:

[<https://sanctifiedart.org/videos/back-to-back-brokenness-worship-film>]

And when we see others as the image of God, we’ll be more likely to reach out when we see inequity and injustice. When we see entire communities of people being treated unfairly (whether on race, religion, politics, education, income, etc.), we’ll respond differently when we see them all as children of God, equally worthy as ourselves.

As it is written in 2 Corinthians, “All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other... We’re Christ’s representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God’s work of making things right between them.”

Challenge: Think of a person you would like to experience reconciliation with. Here are some ways to start that process:

1. A place to start is with yourself. Reflect on how your own thoughts or actions may have contributed to the situation or conflict. What role have YOU played?
2. Seek to understand the other... and often the best way to do this is by actually talking with them.
3. See the other person as a child of God, loved and forgiven just like you.