2 Corinthians 5:20c Be reconciled to God.

Wow. Today is the day. Today is the day that St. Paul’s will gather for a special service of thanks and praise to God for 150 years as a congregation to the glory of God. If you think about that, it really is pretty awesome. This congregation was established in 1871 and has been continuously operating since then. Oh, it is true, there were a few hitches and glitches. For instance from 1871 to 1907 the congregation endured at least 3 splits in its history. One of those splits was responsible for St. John’s Lutheran Church out on Maier Rd. We actually have a picture of that congregation and its members in our files. Exactly when that church folded, we don’t know, but eventually the members there came back to St. Paul. Or during the years 1908 to 1939 there was another period of hardship. There was a shortage of pastors and St. Paul didn’t have its own resident pastor and the result was no regular services. My understanding is that during this period we went in with 250 communicants but came out with about 75 communicants. By the way, it is in 1939 that the congregation determined to move from Snover Road to this location at First and Turner. I think that move was a tremendous godsend.

And all the while, the chief concern of the congregation was the truth and marvel of God’s Word. It was disputes over God’s Word that initially caused the splits. It was the lack of God’s Word that caused the loss of members that I mentioned earlier, we didn’t have a pastor and people left to find a church with a pastor and God’s word on a regular basis. That’s the purpose and reason for a congregation. The sharing of the wonder and marvel of God’s Word. The message of the Savior Jesus and what He has done and accomplished. It really is about ministry, serving souls to the glory of God. Serving souls that they might grasp the joy of Jesus and what He has accomplished.

The text before us today is a great example of what the ministry of God’s Word and his church is to be all about. The Apostle Paul, the very Apostle this church is named after, lays out the purpose and wonder of ministry. Let’s take a look and remind ourselves of just what our Church is all about. Our theme will be: **THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION!**

Note that this is chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians. The reason that is important is so that you grasp the reason for the words here. The Corinthian congregation, because of people who didn’t care about the message of Jesus, had a whole slew of troubles. Included in that trouble was the issue of divisions in the church, divisions based on the men who served. In other words, people got wrapped up in the men who served rather than in the message and Jesus. Of course, the problem was also that the message of Jesus sometimes got a bit obscure as even the pastors, the men who served, instead of focusing on Jesus ended up focusing on themselves. All of this is found addressed and laid out in 1 Corinthians. It wasn’t just divisions, but sin is downplayed, Christ’s coming was falsely taught, and other falsehoods prevailed as a result of the divisions. That’s why you will find the issue of divisions is addressed first and foremost in 1 Corinthians.

The good news is that in 2 Corinthians, many of those problems were resolved in accord with God’s Holy Word. The congregation was getting back to the basics of Jesus but needed just a bit more help. That’s what brings about 2 Corinthians. In this epistle the Holy Spirit leads Paul to point out and highlight all the more the ministry of the Gospel and to drive home that this ministry is about Jesus and his redemptive work. Our verses are really the wrap-up statement that is being made concerning this truth. In other words, verses that summarize what the Gospel of Jesus is really about. Let’s look at what is said.

Verse 14-15. **“For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. 15And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.”**

Here are the verses that lay out the very point of any Christian ministry. If what these words tell you are not the heart and core of your faith and church then you are sadly missing something, something important, eternally important. It is a message that is highlighted by the words “**For the love of Christ compels us.”** That is the driving force, the foundation and purpose of what is to go on in a church. You hear that word, “compel!” We are compelled. Here is what the word means: *“to hold together, to press together, to constrain. The verb implies pressure which confines and restricts as well as controls.” (RR, 469).* I am going to describe this word with this picture: It’s like water in a pump sprayer. When that sprayer is pressurized and the trigger is pulled that water comes streaming out, under pressure, compelled, it has no choice. That’s us and the impact Jesus is to have.

Don’t get fooled. We are told **“the love of Christ”** compels us. This is not love that dismisses sin or ignores God’s Word. This is not love that makes its own rules and then enforces those rules or lack thereof. It is the love of Christ. There is no doubt as to what this love is all about for our verse tells us exactly what this love is about. You would have to be a complete vacuum not to see what is spoken of. The verse says, **“Because we came to this conclusion: One died for all: therefore, all died. And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.”**

What compels us is the message found in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Throw any of those things out and you have a problem. Deny that Jesus is and did what God’s Word says and you lose Jesus. Deny that Jesus suffered and died on the cross as the absolute atonement for the sins of the whole world, that Jesus paid for all sins…deny that and you lose Jesus. Deny that Jesus physically and truly rose from the dead, deny that He came back to life, that he showed himself for 40 days and then ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father…deny that and you lose Jesus. You have nothing to compel you but human desires, human thoughts, human work righteousness and human foolishness. Because it is clear in this verse that the love here is exactly what Jesus is about, what Jesus is proclaimed to be..

We can even turn to a further verse to clarify what is said here. In verse 21 we hear: **“God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”** What an absolutely wonderful and powerful passage. God the Father made Jesus, who was holy and perfect and without sin in any way to become sin for us. That’s just a fancy way of saying Jesus took our sins, paid for them and took care of the problem of sin over us. We learn in Scripture that **“the wages of sin is death.”** If that is true then how did the holy and perfect Jesus die? Because he took our sins. He bore their penalty and suffered God’s wrath and anger for them. All of this so that we might become **“the righteousness of God in him.”** In Jesus we are declared forgiven, pardoned, and redeemed. In Jesus the slate is washed clean, the memory chip is erased, or, if you would, the dirt of your mud-bogging is power washed away. You are clean in Christ.

This teaching is known as objective justification. That Jesus paid for all the sins of all the world. He died for each and every human being that ever lived, suffered for them, for every rotten sin that stood against every soul for all eternity. There are no exceptions. That is the fact of what Jesus did. It’s like the sun up in the sky, the sun of our solar system. It is there. Even on cloudy days it is there. It gives off light, powerful light. But whether you benefit from that sun that is something else.

Because objective justification, a truth that stands all by itself, becomes yours only by “subjective justification,” that means you take and believe or you take in the benefits of the sun. Jesus died for all of our sins, but if you reject that, if you don’t believe that, if you scorn and ridicule that truth of God, then you will not reap the benefits.

Our next verse share the impact of Jesus on us or if you would, tell us about subjective justification. **“As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way. 17So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come! 18And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ…God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”**

The message of Jesus has an impact. We become different as we hear this message, if you would we are compelled to be different. We are new creations. We think of Godly things, we live in godly ways, we contemplate godly good and right, we walk in God’s path and light and wisdom and ways. New. We are new. The old is gone. The old ways, the sin, the desires and lusts, the disobedience and not caring, the rejection of God’s truth…pretty big list here…all are gone in Jesus. God works these things in us, he causes them and helps us in them. Like the seed the sower sows. The sower casts the seed and that is it. Whether the seed grows is entirely in the hand of God. Whether the seed grows or whether a harvest is gathered or even how much of harvest is gathered is all in the hands of God. Remember, God still has an enemy out there who likes to sow weed in God’s fields. Pay attention. Focus on Jesus. Focus on what Jesus has done, or if you would, believe in, trust in, have faith in Jesus and all will be fine. God will lead you in the way that He has set up for you.

Now remember, this doesn’t mean you get to do what you want. Remember that both epistles to the Corinthians were written because the members of the church forgot that Jesus was the point. They forgot the horror of sin, forgot the beauty and wonder of the means of grace and became despisers, abusers of the gospel in Word and sacrament. They began to focus on the human side of church rather than the Godly side, which is to the prominent and dominant. Yes, we are new creatures who have access to the glorious light of the Gospel of Jesus. But if you insist on staying in your dark cave, if you insist on hiding in the shadows, in wearing the darkest of “son” glasses or even if you insist that you need to keep using the world’s prescription of “son” block, you will have a problem. If you find you are despising the gospel in Word and sacrament, then right here and now recognize that you have a ministry problem. You are being the old not the new creation!

We are new in Jesus. In that newness we proclaim the message of Jesus. That’s the part of our verses that I left out so far. That part said, (He) “**gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 19That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. 20Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”**

Here is ministry. Here is what the church is to do. It is to lead you to Jesus. It is to appeal to you, to urge you in Jesus. That’s right, the church is the voice of, the ambassador of Jesus. So if your church is not teaching Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin, that’s a problem. Are you hearing only about do this or that, be this or that, perform this service or that and so forth. Are most of the sermons about you and what you must do or are they about Jesus and what He has done? It is made clear here. This ministry of reconciliation is the message of God in Christ reconciling the world. That is the message of the Redeemer Christ, the Jesus who lived perfectly, suffered eternally, and died lowly. It is the message of a Savior who was raised from the dead. Christ Jesus lives and because he lives you also will live. You are forgiven, you are granted eternal life and salvation in Jesus, not in what you do or are.

That is the church’s plea! **“BE RECONCILED TO GOD.”** To be reconciled means that your status before God has changed. God does not see your sins, but only the righteousness, the holiness and perfection of Jesus in you and on you. God sees it because of faith, that simple clinging to God because Jesus has won the victory for you. Be reconciled. Let that love of Jesus be in your life. Let the message of Jesus and his redemption fill you, overflow in you and change you. Be reconciled. Be compelled to be reconciled. By that I mean, be a child of God who never tires of hearing that you are a child of God, forgiven, reconciled and redeemed in Jesus.

That is the message I pray you always find here at St. Paul and St. James. Service to God. Sometimes, as is clear in our histories, that gospel light of Jesus got dimmed, dimmed by souls that forgot its glory, dimmed by servants who forgot the master and his wonder. Still, over that 150 years, the message of Jesus and his redemption has been here. Lord, continue your blessings upon us and help us for the next 150 to simply be your church that is compelled to proclaim: BE RECONCILED TO GOD! Amen.