

Communion Is Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:11--6:2

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come! All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

When Paul and I have a serious disagreement about something related to our relationship, we will often work things out at the dinner table. By mutual confession and compromise, we begin to remove the barrier between us and work toward restoring our relationship. By the time the meal ends, reconciliation has occurred. The table becomes a place for reconciliation.

The Lord's Table is also a place for reconciliation.

Communion is a time for being reconciled to God. This reconciliation begins with an acknowledgement that our sin has become a barrier in our relationship with God. God has not sinned against us. God has not forsaken a single promise to us. We have sinned against God. Communion is not at all like a husband and wife or two friends sitting down to work out a problem by mutual confession of fault because God is not guilty of forsaking God's promises to us. There is no mutuality of guilt. It is only we who are guilty of jeopardizing the relationship. It is we who have sinned and not even one of us is innocent. Romans 3:23 tells us, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That "all" includes you and me. No matter how "good" we think we are, no matter what a "fine reputation" we have, no matter how "religious" we act, we all fall short of God's will for us as God's people.

A story is told of two men who were trying to escape from an erupting volcano. As the molten lava gushed from the crater, they ran for their lives. All went well until they came to a broad stream of fiery lava which was about twenty feet across. Their only hope of safety was to leap over the river of molten mass. One of the men was old and arthritic; the other was a healthy young athlete. With a running start, they each tried to leap the stream. The first man jumped only a few feet before falling into the bubbling mass to his death. The younger man, with his great strength and athletic agility gave a mighty leap and jumped about eighteen of the twenty feet. Even though he jumped much farther than the first, the result was the same; he too died in the fiery lava. Both men fell short of the goal.

I don't know whether this story is true, but it certainly illustrates a biblical truth: no matter how much effort we exert in trying to reconcile ourselves to God, we all fall short of the glory of God. We fall short as children - seldom obeying our parents as we should and giving them the honor which God commands. We fall short as Spouses - seldom fulfilling the vows we made on the day we were married. We fall short as parents when we do not act honorably toward our children and provide for them the kind of Christian example which we promised on the day of their baptisms. And it goes without saying, that we fall short as Christians when we adopt the thoughts, attitudes, and ways of our hedonistic world.

God knows how miserably we fail to live up to God's desires and expectations, but contrary to those men in the lava flow, God does not allow us to fall to eternal death. God invites us to come dine at God's table of grace, where God will restore us to life through God's forgiveness.

In Holy Communion, we come to dine with our God as prodigal children who have run away from home and squandered the good name God gave us. When we pour out our hearts to God at God's table fully expecting to receive the scolding we deserve, we are surprised when God whispers to our hearts: "I love you my child - you are forgiven. Go with my strength and sin no more." As easily as that, God lovingly reconciles us to Godself. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 the Apostle Paul wrote, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." What God did in a cosmic sense through Christ's coming into the world, God does in an individual sense in Holy Communion. Through the power of the Holy Spirit in and through Communion we are reconciled to God through God's forgiving grace. So, you see, the Lord's Table is a place for reconciliation with God.

The Lord's Table is also a beginning place of reconciliation with our neighbor. At the Lord's Table, God reminds us of our awesome responsibility: just as God has reconciled us to Godself by forgiving us, we are to go and seek reconciliation with those who have sinned against us. We, following God's example, are to forgive those who have hurt, troubled, and wronged us! Just as God took the initiative to forgive us - we are to take the initiative to forgive others. God expects us to forgive them in our hearts and to let them know it by the way we show it in our lives. We are to begin treating them with love as though they had never done anything against us. Reconciliation with our neighbor is the direct result of our forgiveness. There can be no genuine reconciliation without genuine forgiveness.

When we rise from the Lord's Table this morning, we shall be completely forgiven and reconciled to God and God expects us to go and be reconciled to those who have sinned against us. We do not have the privilege of continuing to hold that grudge, hatred, or seething anger. We must forgive and be reconciled no matter how much we've been wronged; no matter how deeply we've been hurt, no matter how sorry we might be feeling for ourselves. Since God has fully forgiven us we have a responsibility to forgive others!

Today the Lord Jesus Christ is inviting you to join him at his table of reconciliation. We come with sin and guilt and humbly acknowledge that. In God's gracious love God tells us that God forgives us and that we are reconciled to God. Then God strengthens us and instructs us to go share God forgiveness and be reconciled to those who have wronged us. God's Table is a place for reconciliation! We are invited to come be reconciled to God and we are instructed to go be reconciled to others. Come, be forgiven by God. Go and do likewise.