

## Living in Christ through Reconciliation

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*"We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."*

For many years the job I had required me to be to work at 5am. The drive was always dark except for a few freeway lights. As I drove my mind wandered for a bit but always moved quickly to focusing on the day ahead. When I moved from Paso Robles to Morro Bay the drive was shorter but it was still dark.

There was a very short window, right after we do the daylight savings time changes, when a hint of light would signal that it was nearly dawn. One such morning I found myself completely taken by the beauty that was displayed before me--no I didn't take my eyes off the road--well not completely anyway.

I imagine many of you have had the same experience of driving along not thinking about your surroundings when suddenly you are taken by something and great wonderment happens. I was so inspired by what I saw that when I got to work I wrote this: *"Looking down on the world is beautiful and awe inspiring, but looking up from the world is majestic!"* I felt, in that moment of watching as the world came to "light", how indescribable God's creation is and what love surrounds us.

I am sure you know the song From a Distance, that is so beautifully sung by Bette Midler. *"God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us, from a distance."*

In that same moment that I mentioned earlier, I realized that God **is** surely watching us, but NOT from a distance. God is in the midst of all of this. God is in the midst of Us.

I just finished watching the historical drama series The Chosen which is about the daily life of Jesus and the Apostles. In it they begin each day, each meal, and end each day with a prayer that begins: *"Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe"*. Then a statement is made about what God is and does. This one touched me especially: *"Blessed are you, LORD our God, King of the universe, who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things."*

I think the Apostle Paul was pointing us toward this very thing. As the new saying goes: "We are all in this together." We belong to the Lord along with all creation. When we finally come to realize that, we also realize what a great privilege and responsibility we have.

Paul echoes Jesus' teaching: God is creator of all things--Jesus is the embodiment of God showing us our connectedness to all that is.

Jesus time and again in sermon after sermon, parable after parable pleads with us to become reconciled. We cannot be reconciled if we are at enmity with one another and with creation.

Paul was given the enormous task by Christ Jesus to "get the word out"--to expand the work of reconciling Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is Lord of both Jew and Gentile--indeed of all humanity.

The catalyst is Love. Nothing mattered except that Jesus was the core, the middle, and the all-encompassing force that made them all one. For in Jesus there could be no judgement, no enmity, no finger pointing.

Paul was a pretty forward-thinking man with, perhaps, some grandiose ideas about the future of this reconciling work, but there was more to come that even Paul could not have imagined. Paul could not have imagined the Industrial Age and the unintended havoc it would wreak on creation and on humanity itself. He could not have imagined the world filled with so much poverty and scarcity.

Certainly, there is blessing in the incredible technology we have today that was barely a glimmer at the beginning of the Industrial Age. Unfortunately, something very important was missing, and, sadly, still seems to be. That something is Love.

Reconciliation work is now much more complicated than ever. I am going to remind us of some of what we, in our world, need to reconcile so that we can truly live Paul's words.

First, we have all heard the term "corporate greed". This is when a company chooses to place significance on increasing profits in a way that harms employees, consumers, and the environment.

I dare to say that I, too, have fallen into the trap of wanting more--wanting better. I admit that I am not the community garden type. I like going to the store and buying whatever I need.

I am grateful to farm laborers. Shoot, I'm grateful for the corporations that own the big farms--at least I was until I found out just exactly how that all works.

In June of 2010 Damien Trujillo published an essay [A Day in the Life of a Farm Worker](#). He tells the story of how much he hated working in the fields on a farm in the Salinas Valley in the

1970s. He was able to go to college and got a degree in journalism. He returned as a reporter to spend the day at a cabbage field in Gilroy. What he found was that little had changed since his boyhood--backing breaking work for little pay and no benefits.

Sure, farmers have done back breaking work for centuries--since the hunter-gatherers gave up their nomadic life for the more stationary life that agriculture brought.

But what happened then? Soon after greed set in and, voila! We have the Roman empire and it goes on from there.

Next, remember learning about The Explorers in school? The early explorers, some of whom are lauded with special holidays, were actually conquerors--claiming native lands for the countries from which they came. This turned into exploitation and eventually the undermining of native peoples and land around the world..

Third: in the great film The Graduate, Benjamin is taken aside at his graduation party by a friend of the family who tells him one word. That one word was a metaphor for a certain way of life.

But I am telling you it is a **real** word--a real thing that permeates every single aspect of our lives. It is THE major product of our society: Plastics. Of all the many environmental issues we face now, plastics seem to rule. The very manufacture of plastic causes our earth to wheeze and groan. That's not because plastic itself is bad. It's because the way it is produced and the way it is discarded shows no concern, no love, for the one thing we all need; the Earth.

Lastly, deforestation. We cannot survive without trees. The main plant spoken of in the Garden of Eden was the tree; namely the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. You don't need to be a botanist to know how important trees are.

Trees eat the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, boost our mental health while raising our physical health, clean the air and create oxygen so we can breathe, give a home to the wildlife, cool us down, and filter our water.

Understanding Jesus' parable about forgiveness isn't just about forgiving someone who we feel has wronged us. It is also about making amends for the wrong that we do to others. This is certainly on a personal level. But it is also on a wider human level.

Thanks be to God that through the Cross of Jesus, his death, resurrection, and ascension we have been forgiven for the greater sin of our wayward ways that cause separation from God. But we must still be willing to accept that forgiveness by living in Christ.

This means forsaking our desire for more and better which promotes and propagates more greed which begets more destruction of our planet.

It **does** feel overwhelming to think so universally--so globally. Therefore, I love to repeat the now well know phrase "think globally, act locally, think globally, act locally".

How we work toward reconciliation, how we live or die as the Lord's is what we do **here**, in **this** place.

The Social Justice Coordinating Team at St. Barnabas has been meeting monthly to address some of the reconciliation issues here in the South County. Jim and Sheila Miller, Gerti Garner, Tom Bormes, Rob Dirksen, Shirley Holgate, Garry Schmidt, Carol Wilcock, Paul Schiro, Lorrie Erno, Sophie Long, Fr. Rob and I have created sub-teams to work on homelessness, LGBTQ, Latino, Christian Nationalism, and elder/disability needs. We will be giving tangible ways the whole congregation can participate in the weeks to come.

Meanwhile, we would love to have more join us so that we can add such things as Creation Care, Indigenous awareness, prison ministries, healthcare, and children and youth ministries.

Paying attention to what is happening in our community and responding to need with love is key to reconciliation.

WE DO NOT live to ourselves. We are the Lord's. We are his body, his hands, and voice of Love. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. Therefore, we must do the work given us to do as the Apostle Paul did.

Love one another, forgive one another, and make amends.

That is the way of the Cross where we can see majestic beauty that is awe-inspiring.  
*"Blessed are you, LORD our God, King of the universe,  
who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things."*