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2 Corinthians 5:11-21 – *Restored Relationships*

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This morning we are looking at an important passage.

It's important because it's in the Bible, yes...

But more than that, it's important because it gets at the basic mission of God...

What God is doing in this world.

And it's important especially for us because it is foundational for where God is leading this church...

Trinity CRC.

We're in the middle of the Church Renewal Lab...

Looking at where we're at as a church—

And where God wants us to be—

Praying that we would have eyes to see where God is already working...

And where he wants us to put our energies into joining him.

With your input, our 15 member CRL team proposed a guiding vision for Trinity:

“Intentionally connecting with  
Christ, each other, and our neighbors,  
for the glory of God.”

When we talk about connecting, we're talking about relationship—

How 2 or more parties are connecting—

And that's what our passage is all about...

It's about relationships...and specifically restored relationships.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

<sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can

answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

The word “reconcile” is used a lot in this passage—

5 times in verses 18-20.

To reconcile means to bring something back together...

It means to restore friendly relations.

In this word there is an inherent assumption of 3 different parts:

1. A relationship once existed...
2. The relationship breaks...
3. And finally, the relationship is put back together...

This is reconciliation.

When we talk about being reconciled to God—

As our passage says—

We can apply these three different parts.

First, we start in a relationship.

In the beginning God creates humanity...

And it's a special relationship.

It's not the kind of relationship where God is uninvolved...

This relationship is not like a little kid who has an ant farm...

Peering through the glass at thousands of little creatures...

Not knowing how to relate and interact with them.

No, God creates humans in his image, and enters into an intimate relationship with them.

It's a relationship where he is actually with them...

Walking around among them in the cool of the day. (Gen 3:8)

Talking to them about how and what they're doing.

In this relationship we found everything we needed.

We didn't question if we were good enough or lovable...

God created us, entered into a relationship with us and loved us...

And that was enough for us.

First, a beautiful, perfect relationship existed between us and God.

But then, the second part, the relationship breaks.

Not in some passive way as if it just happened one day—

As if we don't know what caused it—

But we actively broke this relationship.

We didn't listen to the God who created us...

In fact, we tried to set ourselves over and against God.

Thinking that we knew what was best...

The creature tried to take over the role of creator.

We broke the relationship.

And with that break we disconnected ourselves from the source of life.

Sure, the trees were still beautiful as their leaves danced in the wind...

And the waters still captured an emerald green as the sun hit it just right...

But the most significant relationship in our life was broken...

And nothing could make up for that loss.

It killed us.

With this broken relationship also came the break of all other relationships.

Not only were things perfect with God at the start of things...

They were also perfect with other people...

Imagine that!

No quarreling;

No backstabbing;

No wondering if someone is lying to you.

Relationships were peaceful and life-giving.

But all of that ended with the break.

A movie that speaks powerfully into broken relationships is...“Home Alone...”

The 1990 Christmas comedy where the McAllisters forget their 8-year-old son, Kevin, at home...

While they all go to Paris.

There are plenty of broken relationships in the movie—

Kevin and his family...

Especially Kevin and his mom, and Kevin and his brother Buzz;

Then there’s Kevin and Old Man Marley...

The man in the neighborhood who all of the kids are afraid of...

He drags a trashcan of salt around with his shovel at night clearing his sidewalks...

And the kids in the neighborhood say that there are bodies in the trashcan...because he’s really a serial killer.

But the broken relationship I want to highlight is the one between Old Man Marley and his son.

Kevin and Old Man Marley are sitting in the church together on Christmas Eve.

Old Man Marley tells Kevin that he’s there to watch his granddaughter in the choir...

He’s there early because he can’t come later that evening.

Old Man Marley isn't on speaking terms with his son:

"Years back, before you and your family moved on the block, I had an argument with my son," he tells Kevin.

"We lost our tempers, and I said I didn't care to see him anymore. He said the same, and we haven't spoken to each other since."

So now Marley can't see his granddaughter...he's not welcome in her life.

Who can relate?

Not that you're estranged from your family (maybe you are)...

But that you have relationships that aren't right.

You have firsthand experiences of broken or missing relationships.

I'm sure all of us have stories:

We say things in the heat of the moment we really don't mean...

But there's too much damage to repair things now...

And we're afraid of reaching out...

Afraid of what they might say.

Or someone has said something to us or about us that caused a lot of pain...

And they don't seem to care or want to make things right.

Or maybe we try and try in our marriages, with certain friends or family members...

But we can't seem to make any progress...

It always ends up in a fight.

It's not just broken relationships either...

It's missing relationships too.

As a CRL team we've been listening to you and our neighbors...

And what we're hearing is that people are not feeling connected.

Maybe it's not that the relationship is broken...

But that it doesn't even exist.

People are living life isolated from each other...

Without meaningful relationships that give them joy and life...

They're walking through the difficulties of life alone...

Separated from God and from each other.

Everyone has these experiences because we're all suffering from the same thing.

When we broke our relationship with God...

We really messed things up for our lives with him—

We lost that piece that gave us all of our meaning and worth—

And we messed up things with the people around us.

First, there was a good relationship.

Second, the relationship broke.

But third, the relationship is put back together...

And this is what our passage is all about:

Restored relationship.

**“God reconciled us to himself through Christ.”**

And it's important to say this right:

God reconciled *us to himself*.

We did not reconcile ourselves to God.

It is God who takes the initiative...

And it is God who performs the work of making the relationship right again.

We see this symbolized with Paul's language of being Christ's ambassador.

In ancient times, it was customary for the lesser political power to send an ambassador to the greater power.

The ambassador would plead the case of the lesser power to the greater.

But it's God who sends his ambassadors—

A reversal is happening here—

The greater is coming to the lesser.

God is taking the initiative to restore the relationship with his people.

Our posture was that of being against God still.

We were still trying to play the role of the creator and not creation.

We were still trying to be the ones in control.

But because God loved us—

Because he wanted to be back in a relationship with us—

He did what he had to do to make things right...

While we were still his enemies...(Rom 5:8)

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. (2 Cor 5:21)

The sin that stood between us and God—

The thing that broke our relationship in the first place—

Is taken care of by God himself.

The death of God the Son on the cross was a direct response to our sin.

It is what defeated our sin...

And it is what restores the relationship between God and humanity.

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”  
(5:19)

This is the appeal that God is making through Paul in this letter:

“Be reconciled to God.” (5:20)

This is where it has to start:

Knowing that God loves you...

That no matter who you are or what you’ve done...

No matter what anyone has done or said to you...

God loves you.

Knowing that he created you and wants to be in a relationship with you.

He wants you to seek him out;

To trust him in all things good and bad;

And to give only him your worship.

The God of the universe gave it all to be back in a good relationship with us...

Trust that that relationship has been restored through Christ.

That is where it *starts*...

But it’s not where it *ends*.

Reconciliation has its roots in God and in this relationship...

But it impacts all other relationships around us.

At the end of “Home Alone” on Christmas day...

Kevin stands in his house looking out the window.

And what he sees is a beautiful picture of reconciliation.

Old Man Marley is outside greeting his Christmas visitors:

His son and his son’s family.

Marley hugs his daughter-in-law...hugs his son...

And then scoops up his granddaughter and gives her the biggest hug.

This is a picture of reconciliation—

The restoring of broken relationship—

But it’s not just between us and God...

It’s in all of our relationships...

The scope of reconciliation moves from us out into the world.

And this is what God is doing in us—Trinity Church:

He is proclaiming the message of his love through Christ;

And he is inviting us to bring about his kingdom of restored relationships.

Intentionally connecting with Christ...

Intentionally connecting with each other...

And intentionally connecting with our neighbors...

All for the glory of God...

So that people disconnected from God and from each other might know fullness of life  
that he’s bringing into this world.

Amen.