



INTRO:

If you have your Bible/Order of Gathering, make sure you're looking at **2 Corinthians 5**. We're continuing our **"What Church Can Be"** series, and if you were with us last Sunday, you know we saw that church really can be... family - not just LIKE family, or similar-to family, but actually family in a very life-giving way. Well, this morning, the question we're exploring is this: What is our primary ministry as a family; which is to say, how do we extend beyond ourselves? The reality of families/really any type of community is that, they're never truly healthy unless they extend beyond themselves. Certainly true of church families! Not to mention the LAST thing our neighbors, city/certainly God wants is each of you and us together as a family merely dedicated to our OWN uplift. So **What's our primary ministry? AND How do we go about living it out together?** 2 Things we're exploring today... So again, if you have a Bible/Order of Gathering, follow along, as we hear God's word and what it says ABOUT those 2 things! **Nate** reads. **(PAUSE RECORD)**

TEXT:

So 2 Things we're looking at with respect to our primary **ministry as a church family**. **First**, just **What It Is**, since church families can, obviously, be all over the map with respect to what they do. So **What Is our primary ministry?** And the very obvious answer, as you can see, is it's a *"ministry of reconciliation."* Paul says, Jesus *"gave us the ministry of reconciliation."* Now to be clear, the *"us"* there is specifically referring to Paul and His fellow Apostles. You remember the entire reason Paul's writing is to lead the Corinthians to THEMSELVES reconcile. But even though Paul and the Apostles are in view here, commentators note that, reference to you and me/ really any Christ-follower can't be excluded. Cuz of course, it wasn't just Paul or the Apostles, whom Jesus reconciled;¹ it was as Paul says, *"the world,"*/all humanity,² or as **Colossians 1:20** says, *"(Jesus) has reconciled to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."* So we're *"given a ministry"* or as **v.19** says, *"a message"* ...of reconciliation. And we talked about it last week, but in case you weren't here, you're in luck, cuz Paul defines exactly what he means by this *"ministry or message of reconciliation."* You see he says, *"it's that in Christ, God...(is) not counting our trespasses against us!"*

Listen: The ministry of every church family/the reason WE as a church family/YOU as a part of this church family...are here, is not just to consume/certainly not just to be entertained, BUT to spread the best news the world will ever hear - news not about something we need to go DO, but about something that's already been DONE; namely, God having granted forgiveness of sin, in the cross of His Son. **Think about that:** In a world that is seemingly ALWAYS keeping score - who's good/bad, right/wrong, in/out, acceptable/unacceptable - God, the ONE person, who has every right to keep score, has thrown away His scorecard, and is no longer *"counting your trespasses against you."* That's not only good news - literally "gospel" - it's the best news the world has ever known! Because in dying on the Cross, Jesus, you understand, announced His Father's dealings with the sin-problem that's brought every evil and dysfunction into our lives

¹ Murray J. Harris, *"2 Corinthians,"* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 354.

² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 293.

and the world - that sin-problem - to be “finished.” There’s now not a single thing anyone needs to do to fix the world, be brought back to God and experience the life for which they’re created. It’s been and WILL BE DONE by Christ. As Peter says, “*the righteous (suffering) for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.*”³ As Paul says here, “*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting (our) trespasses against (us).*”... THAT’S our ministry and message! In a sense, simply pointing people to believe and enjoy the grandeur of what’s already theirs...if only they’ll receive it.

This is why, perhaps you know, Jesus famously said, “*whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” And what’s so wonderful about Jesus’ words there - like Paul’s here - is that they aren’t advice; they’re news! Right, advice tells you things you should, could, or oughta do to bring about a possibility. News though (at least before the advent of spin-based cable news), news is true regardless of if we do anything about it or not. Jesus is saying, “*News-flash, whoever simply BELIEVES in me will be saved and by extension come to enjoy the life I died to give!*” It’s a promise!... THAT’S what we invite people to see and believe - that, you could say, there’s this, like, amazing global potluck going on. And you and everyone around you is invited. We’re talking the finest meats and cheeses, tapas, craft brew, even exotic things you’ve never heard of wrapped in exotic things you’ve never heard of...It’s all there. You’re invited, and you don’t have to bring a thing, but yourself!

Now here’s the thing with potlucks or dinner at a neighbor’s/even some of our Missional Family Meetings: Whoever’s hosting sends out an invitation right? Says, “*you’re invited. All ya need to do is come.*” **But what do we do?** We say, “*thanks...what can I bring?*” And they say, “*nothing. Everything’s prepared. All you need to do is come.*” And we say, “*thanks!*” **And then what do we do?** We go to Stop N Shop and pick up one of those cheap fruit trays with way too much honeydew melon in it, cuz we can’t bear the thought of showing up empty-handed/NOT contributing. We’re like Michael Scott showing up to CEO David Wallace’s lavish corporate party with a Tupperware of warmed-over coleslaw...In other words, we refuse to take the host at their word that all we have to DO is show up BECAUSE everything’s already been DONE!

Likewise, PEOPLE/maybe YOU - even when invited to see and believe what Jesus has DONE, will nevertheless refuse to take Him at His word and persist in unbelief - BE like that older prodigal son in Jesus’ famous parable, who ignorantly refused to join the party, because he couldn’t believe that his efforts didn’t add anything TO the party! That’s gonna happen. But you understand, people’s responses of unbelief to our ministry and message/YOUR response doesn’t negate the reality of things - that we’re nevertheless, as Paul is showing us here, entangled in the reconciliation God has already brought to the world.

It’s like prior to the Copernican Revolution when, ya know, the Earth was believed to be the center of the universe. For hundreds of years we perceived something to be true, that was in actuality was false. And no matter how many people refused Copernicus’ astronomical model,

³ 1 Peter 3:18

reality still reigned. Likewise, regardless of if people/you persist in unbelief, the reality that Jesus has thrown away the scorecard on sin, still remains!

And so our ministry and message is simply, as one scholar says, *“God has confronted us with our transgressions, BUT has taken the initiative in Christ to resolve the problem (our transgressions) have created. (And so all that) remains, is for us to accept we’ve done wrong, repent, and take God up on His offer of friendship.”*⁴ Cuz at the end of the day, BECAUSE Jesus has swallowed up your sin in His death on the cross - your sin can no longer be *“counted against you”* - it was already *“counted”* against Him, so that NOW the only thing that keeps anyone from enjoying a life free of scorecards is NOT taking the scoreKEEPER at His Word!⁵

That’s our ministry and message: reconciliation as a fact, that simply needs to be received! If you’re a follower of Christ this morning because you’ve been reconciled to God, IN Christ, THAT’S what God has deputized you to be about AND what ultimately makes church... THE church, since AS a church, we’re of course, *“defined by what we declare!”* **That’s our ministry!**

So **Second, How then Do We Live Out This Ministry Together?** Or maybe better said, what’s the medium that drives this message of *“God no longer counting our sins against us?”* Well, notice again that word, *“world”* there. Paul says, *“in Christ God was reconciling the WORLD to himself.”* Literally all humanity right?... Now here’s the thing about something having been DONE for ALL the world - distinctions, ya know all the categories and camps we use to tell ourselves we’re something - those distinctions... get erased. As Stephen Mosley says, *“Christ’s great act of reconciliation ERASES human distinctions.”* There’s no ability to look down on *“the world,”* because of course, if EVERYONE is included, then NO one gets EXcluded on the basis of some arbitrary distinction - class, race, politics, gender, you name it. Distinctions get erased!

Now let me ask you: In what context/maybe the ONLY context can you find people interacting with each other, not only apart from looking down ON each other, but apart from distinctions defining their interaction?... The only context I know of is... friendship right? - Hence the title of my message! Friendships are maybe the only context in which intimacy is achieved precisely BECAUSE distinctions don’t divide. Actually, Aristotle was adamant that when you have social equals, you’ll likely get intimate friendship.⁶ If that’s true, and I think it is, it means then, that FRIENDSHIPS - not church services, events or even mission trips - make the BEST context or medium for driving God’s message reconciliation. Cuz, in a sense, they have the ability to BOTH show and tell of God not counting our sins against us. Show, because you’re friendship with someone is a kind of reflection or mirror of God’s friendship to us. And Tell, because of course, a friendship breeds trust, which makes it all the more effective when you are communicating a message of simply needing to trust Christ in order to become a friend of God’s. **Friendship!** The

⁴ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 293.

⁵ “The difference between the believer and the unbeliever does not lie in the guilt or innocence of either, it lies in the different attitudes they take toward the ‘light.’” - Merrill C. Tenney, “John,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 50.

⁶ Insight about Aristotle from “Money and the Power of the Spirit - Money and Possessions - In the Teaching of Saint Luke - June 27, 2010 - Acts 4:29–37 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

best medium for our “*ministry*”/“*message*” of “*reconciliation*” that’s been “*entrusted*” to us, is simply on-going and growing friendships. Just making friends/BEING a good friend/being intentional WITH your friendships!...Perhaps it's no wonder why the most/I guess you'd say, “infamous” title Jesus was ever given was that of: “*friend of sinners.*” ***Friendship!***

Now among other reasons, here’s why this medium is SUCH good news with respect to living out our ministry and declaring our message: Statistics say that in our post-Christian society, 80% of people/80% are completely disinterested in church as it currently exists? And that number has only been growing over the last 10-15 years AND is dramatically higher in our city and cities across the Northeast.⁷ And so recognizing this, what churches have, typically, attempted to do is simply try to preserve - through tweaking, marketing, etc - current, but dying western models FOR church, like “come to our thing and do our stuff”...INSTEAD OF simply seeing the beauty of friendship as a medium!...Now that’s not to say that the “thing” and “the stuff” are bad. No! most of it’s incredibly Biblical. WE gather here every week because understand the value of having a place where, hopefully, simple hospitality and surprising grace can collide for your weekly encouragement...BUT it is to say that what we work hard at, is not so much, making this gathering or others things we do as a church highly produced or highly packaged, since frankly, no matter how well produced or packaged it is, the majority of people still aren’t interested - but rather work hard to make em spaces in which more-and-more on-going and growing friendships can occur, WHERE the news of Jesus’ reconciliation can be repeatedly declared, displayed...and hopefully believed. Cuz ya know, while statistics might say that 80% of people are disinterested in church as it currently exists; those same statistics also say all of us/all people desire deep friendship almost more than anything. ***Friendship! Do you have friendships in which you’re continually encouraged to trust Jesus for every area of life? Are YOU that kind of friend to someone else - ESPECIALLY someone who hasn’t heard about what Jesus has done for em OR hasn’t been given opportunity to trust IN it?***

And if you’re thinking, “*I’d like to have those kind of friends/BE that kinda friend,*” - cuz in-part, this is what God calls us to be as His disciples making disciples - let me just give you a couple suggestions before we close here: ***First***, just consider your ***3N’s*** - Your ***Neighbors***, Your ***Norms*** and Your ***Network***; meaning Who’s around you/your ***Neighbors***...Who do you consistently run into/your ***Norms***...and Who are you already connected with/your ***Network***. And the reason I say start there is because one of the ingredients of real friendship...is just proximity. Jennie Allen, in her book, *Find Your People: Building Deep Community In A Lonely World* suggests that we should prioritize friends who live within a walk or short drive from us, BECAUSE the reality is, even if you have a bunch of good friends, but they’re all spread out, it’s gonna be increasingly hard to connect with em and even harder to have those connections be intentional for the sake of sharing Christ. Some of you might need to consider today, a reorientation toward clearing things off your schedule, taking things slower, or just being closer to those who need to hear-about and trust-in what Jesus has done for em!

⁷ Stat from “Reclaiming Church: Equipping The Conversations Most Crucial To The Church’s Identity and Ministry” - p.13

Tomorrow I'm flying out-of-state to meet with a number of different churches over the course of the week, and just share some of the story of how God's been at work in our midst. And one of the things I plan on sharing is how so many people/many of YOU, specifically moved to Southie in order to be close to a people who need to hear and believe that God's not counting their sins against em. And I know, that for everyone, it's not possible to live in the exact community in which your church family exists, but I commend even those of you who've moved OUT of Southie for not moving far away and desiring to still be close TO those neighbors and maintain a lot of the same norms and networks. Cuz it just shows that God's been working in that you understand, not only, the good news of the message and ministry we have, but the wonderful medium of friendship that drives that message...Some of you might need to consider a reorientation today toward smaller, slower or closer, which you can do by just considering your **3Ns**, and who it is God's already allowing you to be around, running into and connecting with. Cuz to be sure, our God is not one who wastes relationships. He's one who dies to reconcile em!

Second, just consider your rhythm of life. In other words your, as we've said before, **Going**, **Connecting** and **Pausing** - That was kinda Jesus' rhythm in the Scriptures - seeing your everyday comings and **Goings** as opportunities for loving people/declaring the love Jesus has FOR people...Then **Connecting** with those you've met or know. Might be over coffee, drinks, at the park, a meal - this is what our Missional Family Meetings are about - Connecting with those who are hungry to learn about Jesus and then inviting others into it as you have opportunity...Just this week, my Missional Family decided that we wanted to just have some time to, not only, connect with each other but invite some neighbors in. So no big agenda, just a little prayer, pizza and hanging out talking. And it was great. We had 6 neighbors who aren't part of the church join, all of which said after, "*we should do this again.*" So sometimes connecting with more of an agenda/other times just inviting folks into it...And then, of course, having a consistent rhythm of **Pause**, like THIS each Sunday/Sabbath, where we're able to come together and be encouraged from the Scriptures in a really intentional way, SO AS to then be sent out to Go and Connect again...**Do you see your life along that rhythm?** Because ultimately HAVING a rhythm of life like that fosters things like consistency and shared purpose with people, BOTH of which are ingredients for the kind of friendships in which the message of Christ can be shared! But **Finally**, you gotta understand that ultimately, you develop these kinds of friendships/ BECOME that kinda friend, by not just doing a few things, but by REALLY taking in what Jesus has DONE...for you! How He's become, not just a generic "*friend of sinners,*" but YOUR friend - so committed to you as to've been willing to die FOR you! You're never gonna find a friend more committed to you than He is! And when you really take that in/even if you don't know exactly where or how to start with those friendships; I promise you, you'll begin to figure it out. Because His friendship of you will spill over to YOU wanting to share that friendship with others. So let it dawn on you in a fresh way now that Jesus has, not only, given you the "*ministry of reconciliation,*" but done so PRECISELY because He's "*no longer counting your trespasses against you.*" He's your friend...and He invites you to befriend others in His name! So ya see, **Church Can Be ___Friends!...Let's Pray!**