
**"You Are All Ministers of Reconciliation"
(2 Corinthians 5:11-21)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Proposition: Every Christian must be involved in reconciling people to God.

Introduction:

This summer around 40 of our members are heading off to locations near and far to serve and lead people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Every year God has graciously allowed us to become more involved in local and global missions. It's sort of an answer to the prayer of Jabez where he prayed for God to increase his territory. And God has answered our prayers as well. And it's also a result of God honoring and blessing our church's faithfulness to the task. And often times the way God blesses faithfulness is with more ministry responsibilities. So what God is doing in our church is incredibly exciting. We already sent one team back in February to Mexico. We're sending off two teams to difficult areas of our city with Toronto City Mission – St. James Town and Willowtree. We're sending a team to Mexico tomorrow. We're sending off a team to Kyrgyzstan in a week. We're sending off a team to Cambodia in August. We're sending off our first Emerge team to Mexico in September and as individuals we have one person (Caroline Ahn) on summer staff w/ Toronto City Mission. We have another person (G.K.) going w/ R.A.C. for a month to reach high-risk girls in Cambodia. We have two ladies (G.L. and H.K.) going for extended trips to help the M. in Kyrgyzstan.

On top of that we as a church are preparing to launch an orphanage in Cambodia. We have a team of elders and deacons there right now researching and gathering information. And of course our own A.C. just finished her last week of work as a nurse will now be focused on preparing to go to Cambodia as a career missionary. And in the meantime will join our staff as a missionary intern, just as JA did a couple years ago.

And that's just this year. A ton of you have volunteered in local missions agencies. You've gone on past mission trips. And you've been engaged in evangelism with people in your range of influence.

And I'll tell you, part of our M.O. or strategy is to be engaged in long-term, short-term missions. So we don't go to one location one year and try another one another year and on and on. No, we go to one location repeatedly and this has proved very effective and successful as we value the old and new relationships that are built on the field. In my opinion, this is the best way to do short-term missions.

This is not so we'll stick out our chests and pat each other on the back and get big headed. It's all to say that God is moving in our midst. He's empowering our church. He's using us. He's giving us more responsibilities. He's challenging us to pray harder. He's encouraging us to give more generously and sacrificially.

And so as we officially kick off summer missions, I'd like to share with all of you the nature of the ministry that God has given to all of his followers. Whether you're going on a trip summer, or

have gone to one in the past, or have never gone on one, all of us, God calls us to be ministers of reconciliation.

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Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 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. 13 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. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 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.

16 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. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 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. 20 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. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We need to have a thorough understanding of the gospel. (18-19, 21)

Think of how important this is. Every single believer must have a thorough understanding of the gospel. The fancy theological word for this is soteriology, which comes from the Greek word for salvation, soterios.

It is somewhat alarming how many of today's Christians do not have a good understanding of the gospel. I'll give you an example. One of the exercises that all baptism and confirmation candidates are required to do is to write out their personal stories of how they became Christians. So I will give them instructions and some general guidelines like, 1) start with what your life was like before you became a Christian. 2) explain how you became a Christian. 3) And what has your life been like since becoming one. And where they get hung up is at #2, explaining how you became a Christian. And I would give them some pointers like, mention your awareness of sin, putting your faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as the payment for your sins. And then committing your life to him.

And then the drafts of their testimonies would come in and they all did incredibly at telling their story. They talked about their past and the problems that they were dealing with. Then they mentioned the moment or season they became Christians. They remember the emotions. They remember the place they were at. And they conclude with how life has been since that time. But almost all of them- I would say 9 out of 10, do not articulate clearly, the basic tenets of the gospel and how they became Christians. That's a problem. And part of that problem is the fault of the pastor. I haven't done a good enough job of explaining the gospel message.

But this is so crucial because all of us at some point in our lives, whether over lunch at work or on a mission trip, will have the chance to share the life transforming message of the love of God in the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, which is also known as the gospel or good news.

Here's how Paul articulates the gospel in this passage.

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 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.

So here is the first way, the simplest way that Paul explains the gospel. "Christ died for all." I don't think you can get any simpler than that. But the phrase is loaded. Because a typical person today would ask a multi-faceted question.

1) Why did he die? Which can mean...a) for what did he die? B) for whom did he die? C) and why did he have to die in the first place? D) but why? What was the motivation?

And from these questions would come certain answers.

a) for what did he die? He died for sins.

b) for whom did he die? He died for sinners.

c) and why did he have to die in the first place? Because God is just and holy and he cannot leave sin unpunished.

d) but why? What was the motivation? Because he loved us.

And then at the end of this passage he explains the gospel message in more depth.

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 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. 20 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. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The message of the gospel is a message of reconciliation. A message of peace. A message of healing a broken relationship. It's a message of forgiveness, of letting by-gones be by-gones.

- a) And God was doing the reconciling.
- b) And the reconciling was in Christ.
- c) And it was done by God not counting people's sins against them.
- d) How did he do that? V21. It is one of the most powerful passages of what was going on behind the scenes when Christ. The language that Paul uses is very strong, in your face, shock value language. He doesn't say that that Christ took upon himself our sin. Or he bore our sins or something like that. And he's not saying that Jesus became a sinner. He states the Christ himself became sin for us. Here's how one commentator explains it. "So complete was the identification of the sinless Christ with the sin of the sinner, including its dire guilt and its dreadful consequences of separation from God, that Paul could say profoundly, "God made him...to be sin for us."
- e) And then look at how explains the outcome. "So that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Now that's a weird statement too because what we would expect is that we would receive the righteousness that comes from God. And that element is true as well. But what Paul is saying in addition to that fact is that, in some mysterious way, when we became Christians, we actually share in the righteousness that characterizes God himself.

That's the gospel. So as you depart for missions and as you do missions amongst your friends and family, have a full understanding of the gospel.

We need to have the proper motivation (14).
There can be a whole slew of reasons to do missions.

1. wanderlust
2. meeting new people
3. meeting new cultures
4. to get the missions monkey off your back
5. to escape problems
6. because you have nothing better to do this summer
7. because it'd be fun

But there is a motivation that is the best motivation. This motivation is compelling. This motivation messes with your heart. This motivation makes you do something you never dreamt you would or could ever do. What is it? The motivation is love.

You and I all have heard of and have personally experienced human love relationships. You know the crazy things this love will make you do. It'll make you purchase the stupidest, most impractical, non-sensical items for the person you love. When Linda and I first started dating in college, before too long, I was head over heels in love with her. And one day I was walking on the campus with my head in the clouds and thinking of how much I love her, when I entered the campus store where they sell all the campus gear like sweatshirts and jackets and backpacks. And as I was browsing the store I saw these 3 little pigs. They were about yay big and if you squeezed them they'd let out a little squeel. And so here I am in the bookstore, a grown man, proud of his masculinity, playing with and squeezing little toy pigs. But all I could think of was these pigs are so cute and adorable and they remind me of Linda. So what do you think I did? I did what any university student would do. I charged it on my fresh university student preapproved credit card.

Now that's a pretty stupid story of a stupid kid who's in love.

Now you and I have experienced something far greater than human love. We have personally experienced, in an experience that's beyond the description of words, the indescribable love of Christ. That Jesus, the son of God, who was perfectly God and perfectly man. Jesus who had never sinned, who was the spotless, and immaculate lamb of God. Jesus, God's only beloved and precious son, because of his incredible love for us, took upon himself the punishment for the sins of the world, died on a cross and pain that penalty. And then 3 days later rose again back to life to defeat once and for all the devil and death and sin, so that you and I and anyone else who would accept this gift, could have a intimate and personal relationship with our creator, God. That's the love that you and I have experienced. That's the kind of love that compels us to forsake family and friends, and comfort and money, prestige and popularity, if only we could tell someone about this love.

That's how we should understand it. Now think of the way that would affect your witness for him. For example, before when you might have said to someone that 'God loves you', you probably meant it in a general "God is love" type of way. Now with a complete understanding of the gospel,

knowing that the gospel means that “Christ died for all!” and that in the death of Christ, God was reconciling relationships, with all that understanding, then say to someone, “God loves you”. I think the impact will be night and day. Allow the love of Christ to compel you on your mission both at home and abroad.

We need to have a proper understanding of people and the potential they have in Christ.

16 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. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Before our own personal encounter with Christ, we viewed people in a certain light. We viewed them the way the world viewed them. How does the world view people?

1. By race
2. By economic class
3. By education
4. By gender
5. Sometimes a little lower than the animals. Go to a campus and put up signs to save the whales and the trees and the tiger and all that, and you’ll probably get a decent crowd. Put up a sign to save the unborn child and you’ll get a riot. We are a country, remember that gives the highest civilian awards to abortion doctors.
6. We view people as projects, as a means to feel good about myself.

But now, as Christians, we must not view people this way. We need to begin viewing people from a new perspective (16-17).

1. inherently valuable as the only species that bears the image of God.
2. As potential new Creations.

CS Lewis shares the story in one of his writings of how we ought be careful how we treat people whether they are Christians or not. Because he says, we don’t what type of awesome being they’ll become, a creature you might be tempted to worship.

That’s what we’re dealing with here. Every child. Every co-worker, every new comer that walks into our church, is a potential new-creation. How would that change the way you relate to them?

So everyone who considers themselves as followers of Christ, you are all ministers of reconciliation (19b-20)

19b And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 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.

God is all about incarnational ministry. He doesn’t do ministry from a control tower or locked away in a sterile laboratory or off in a war warm thousands of miles from the battlefield. God is all about flesh-to-flesh, face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder, human-to-human ministry. He modeled it in Jesus. And he hands that same ministry over to us.

Many of you will be able to relate to this. I was the chair of this planning committee for our denominational conference. There were four of us on the team. I was in Toronto. One was in Hamilton, another in St. Catharine's, and one in L.A. So our initial conversations began through email. Communication wasn't bad...but things weren't getting done...time was running out and frustrations were mounting. So I decided...let's get on a conference call. Not a bad thing. Better than email. But the problem was when one or more members would forget and not log in to the conference call. And still there was quite a lot of lag time in getting work done. So finally we were getting desperate and so we said, we gotta meet face-to-face. And so we scheduled a two-day meeting in Toronto. The two drove in, the one flew in and we got so much accomplished in that face-to-face meeting then we ever could've over email or on the conference call. Communication is always better face to face. You're less likely to yell at someone face-to-face. You can better assess the situation face-to-face. You can better relate your desires and wishes when you are face-to-face.

God's no dummy either. Face-to-face is the reason we spend tens of thousands of dollars annually to do short term missions. Face-to-face is why we encourage folks to volunteer week-in and week-out at TCM. Face-to-face is why we gather here at church, and not have church over a satellite connection in our living rooms. Face-to-face is why we send individuals and families to difficult locations that are bereft of the comforts of North America, to learn a new culture and language, and build face-to-face relationships, one person at a time. We do all of this because this is the model of ministry God modeled for us.

All of us have been commissioned by God to be incarnational, face-to-face ministers of reconciliation.

Conclusion:

Friends, let's together as a community commit to become a church and individuals that will take this calling with all seriousness and commitment. No matter where we are, no matter where we go, that we will, motivated by Christ's love, and with a thorough understanding of the gospel, a new perspective toward people, be ministers of reconciliation.