

Sermon for 8am - Romans 5:1-11

Reconciliation is a key word, among many key words, in our passage this morning. It's a word which is increasingly in vogue – we talk about reconciling couples, families, victims and perpetrators, communities, warring factions, victims and their oppressors. Whole organisations and schemes have been designed around reconciling hurt or disagreeing groups: from the great work that Relate does to the successes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

Reconciliation is in fashion, it is everywhere, and yet when we look around, it seems like it is also needed more than ever. We think of our own families or those of our friends and it is uncommon for one of us not to be able to identify a family torn apart in one way or another. We think of our town and the divisions within it. We think of Brexit and all the reconciling work that needs to go on there. We think of international relations and we cannot quite imagine what reconciliation between North and South Korea, reconciliation in the Middle East, reconciliation in Syria, and so on would look like. It is just so far away from our reality.

Perhaps in this passage from Romans, however, we have a model of Christian reconciliation and what it looks like. One of the key things is that Christian reconciliation is not simply a legal process. The passage talks about justification, which is a legal term of declaring someone innocent, but it moves on from there. Reconciliation is so much more than simply forgiving someone's debt – it is a repairing of a relationship. It's not like God forgives us and returns us to a neutral state in his sight. Instead, God forgives and reconciles through Jesus. This reconciliation means we now have a privileged position of access to God through faith in Jesus. We are adopted sons, adopted daughters, and saved people. Christian reconciliation is about more than simply forgiving and moving on. It is repairing relationships. It is about grace. My New Testament tutor at college used to define grace like this: Forgiveness is when someone puts a brick through your window and you forgive them, you release them from the punishment they should have received. Grace, is when someone puts a brick through your window and so you bake them a cake. Grace is miles over and above simply forgiveness.

So firstly, Christian reconciliation is repairing of relationships, modelled for us by God, in Jesus. Secondly, Christian reconciliation may be initiated by the injured party. We are used to the idea that reconciliation requires the person in the wrong to apologise and make reparation. It feels an appropriate response to a problem. And it is. But God did not wait for us to follow this model. In verse 6 and 8, God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still his enemies, Jesus died for us. God took the initiative in this reconciliation. This is hard. Imagine making the first move at reconciliation with someone who has really damaged you but who seems completely unrepentant or worse still actively is your enemy. This is what God has done for us. And we can only have the strength to begin to do this with others if we have the grace from God ourselves to understand that God did this first for us.

Thirdly and closely following, Christian reconciliation is costly. It cost God his son. It also cost him the possibility that he would pour his heart out to offer us reconciliation, only for us to slam the door in his face. How must it feel to have paid the great price so reconciliation can happen and peace with God can be established, only to have that peace and reconciliation rejected or even worse ignored! Reconciliation is costly for Christians. It will be costly for each of us whenever we engaged with it seriously. God paid the price for us, and we can follow his model for others.

The final thing about Christian reconciliation is that it reveals God's glory. God's glory and victory over the powers of sin and darkness are demonstrated through Jesus, through God's own selfless giving to save us. Through this, we become the sculptures if you like, through which God's glorious artistry is demonstrated. Reconciling and saving us through himself is an act which demonstrates God's glory. As we reconcile with those around us, God's glory can be seen in us, as creatures who have been saved and reconciled to God, carrying on this saving and reconciling action and therefore bring even more glory to God, the one who we follow.

So Christian reconciliation models what God has done for us. He has repaired our relationship with him, he has initiated this repair despite our enmity and apathy. He has done this in a costly fashion, giving of himself to save us, and by doing this he has revealed his glory. Thanks be to God! As Christians we are called to do the same and thereby heaping glory upon glory to God who we serve and imitate, no matter the cost, no matter who this means we end up in good relations with.

God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Amen.