

Be Reconciled to God
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2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

^{20b} we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹ As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, ‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Paul begins “we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” What does that really mean to be reconciled? Next door, the sacrament of reconciliation first happens when one makes his or her first confession to God through a priest. Confession is the beginning of making things right with God. The dictionary defines reconciling as restoring a relationship.¹ Well, confessing to God the things for which you are sorry, the things which you have done that draw you away from God, certainly builds a bridge in restoring a right relationship with God.

As we enter Lent today, there are other tried and true ways to build that bridge. Some choose to give something up at Lent. Such a concept comes out of the earliest roots of our faith, this idea of sacrifice for God. What makes it a sacrifice pleasing in God’s sight is that the sacrifice not be empty but, instead, be given in order to come closer to God. What that means is giving up something that otherwise draws you away from God. Giving up chocolate, for example, may seem insignificant in this way but it has great significance if chocolate is your go-to in times of stress and you replace it with prayer to God. If worrying is your crutch, again giving up your worrying in exchange for prayer to God is surely an acceptable sacrifice. Giving up the snooze button and using your extra time to go and serve others is another acceptable sacrifice. Starbucks or Caribou or Steaming Cup money going instead to a charitable cause is an acceptable sacrifice.

Another way to reconcile to God involves not breaking ties but committing. Commit yourself to daily reading of Scripture. Commit yourself to daily prayer for the PC(USA) mission partners, for your

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reconcile>

neighbors, for the churches in Waukesha, for people in another country where there I great suffering, or for the families and friends of Newtown, Connecticut, Staten Island, New York, Haiti. Commit yourself to noticing ten things of beauty in God's creation each day. Commit yourself to listening for God in others. Commit yourself to an exercise regimen if to do so means caring for God's good creation of you.

But why Lent? Why do we take special notice of our broken relationships with God during Lent? Paul gives us an excellent reason in his urging in the second letter to the Corinthians: "we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain." He writes, too, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Paul means that God made Christ in our likeness, like sinful beings who turn away from God instead of to God, so that we might find our way back to God, back to right relationship with God, back to the righteousness of God. Paul's words at the beginning of the Lenten journey call to attention the fact that the price of Christ's life was paid that we might be able to be closer to God. As we lead up to the week and the day where we remember the costly death of Christ on the cross, it is right that we are ever mindful of the significance and the seriousness and the meaningfulness of that death.

It follows, then, that spending forty days reconciling to God brings us closer to God and opens our eyes even more to see what a gift we have been given through Christ's death and resurrection. We understand more clearly how very precious we are to God and how very precious our friends, neighbors, and enemies are to God as well. We can better be humble rather than blithe about the saving acts of Christ in his death and of God in the resurrection. We can *notice* the meaning of Easter when we have spent forty days opening our eyes to see God in relationship with us. This is why Lent is considered a season of preparation. We prepare to receive the gift of new life with full appreciation. Let us begin that preparation with prayer.

Let us pray: O God, we turn to you now. With the mark of death upon our foreheads, we make the promise to actively, gratefully, and humbly receive your gift of eternal life, given at such a cost. Strengthen us in our turning back to you that we might become ever more faithful until that day when this life is done, we pray. Amen.