



RECONCILIATION

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Have you heard the phrase, “Think globally, act locally?” I thought that was a recent invention that had to do with climate change and recycling. But it actually can be traced back to a man named Patrick Geddes who lived in Edinburgh, Scotland back in the early 1900s.

Geddes did many things, but what he became well known for was city planning. It was at the height of the industrial revolution when cities were exploding with growth and faced with all kinds of challenges because of it. Geddes believed that as big as these metropolitan areas were getting, the best way to find solutions to their problems was to really dig into the local customs and culture for answers. His principles were applied in countries from Israel to India.

But back home in Scotland, He created this really unusual museum called Outlook Tower. You started a tour up on the roof, getting an incredible 360 degree panoramic view of Edinburgh. Then you went into an observatory where this sophisticated periscope camera projected moving images of the city in miniature to give you a different perspective. Then there was a room with a single chair in it for you to think about what you’d seen.

The further you went down, the more the local was connected with the global. They had a transparent model of the world, with the goal being that you would begin to see how you related to the larger whole.

We are six weeks into our tour of the core values of New Day, and it’s a bit like that museum. We started out at the top, getting a panoramic picture, and then level by level we’ve explored how the different parts fit together. The goal is to help us see how we connect individually to the larger picture. Because while all these values are big picture “global” ideas, they really require action at a much more local level. I have to wrestle with how to apply these universal concepts to my own life.

Once again, here are the values we’ve looked at so far:

1. Worship is central.
2. Truth must be well-told.
3. The church is a mission outpost.

4. Every Christian is a minister.
5. Authenticity rules the day.

This morning we're looking at value #6: **The church must lead the way in love and reconciliation.** Here we get to the heartbeat of our mission. Jesus told his disciples that the one way the world would know they were his followers was by the way they loved one another. Paul told the church in Corinth that the ministry God has given us is the ministry of reconciliation. This is what we are supposed to be about. It's bedrock.

I want to zero in on the word reconciliation today, because that's such a critical piece. Reconciliation is one of those words like redemption that is full of imagery and meaning. It's a bookkeeping term, talking about the exchange of money. When there are discrepancies in your checkbook and the numbers in one column don't line up with the numbers in another, you have to find a way to reconcile the two. Sometimes it's a simple matter of recalculating, but sometimes the only way to balance things is to take money from a different account and deposit it to cover what's missing so you don't overdraft.

When we apply the word to people who are not on the same page about something, the person doing the reconciling is drawing from their own reserves to cover the difference. There is an investment. There is personal cost to it.

What I have discovered about reconciliation is that it is a beautiful sounding idea...until you're the one who has to do it. Everyone's in favor of reconciling as long as it is the other person's job. When it's you, it's hard. And yet that's what we're called to do, so we can't get around it.

We'd rather keep it in the realm of ideas. But reconciliation is a relationship word, and the only way to really have a meaningful conversation about it is to talk in personal terms, to bring it down to where it intersects our lives with our families and friends.

That's where Jesus focused the discussion when he was giving his Sermon on the Mount. He was explaining how our relationships with each other are so important.

Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

I saw things in this passage this week that I hadn't noticed before. Jesus talks about us presenting our gifts to God, but I see some hidden gifts from him to us in this passage as it relates to reconciliation.

The first gift I found is that **worship can wake us up.** In the past, I always read this story as saying we had to make things right each other before we enter into worship. Don't come and talk to God until you've got your ducks in a row. But that's not quite right. Because the picture Jesus paints is of someone coming to worship and **THERE**

REMEMBERING that their brother has something against them...In other words, the place we're often reminded about our unfinished business is when we come before God's throne to worship him. He gives us those moments there as opportunities to discover truth we hadn't seen clearly before.

There is something soul-stirring in prayer and praise that sensitizes our spirit, and that's a gift from God. Last weekend, our ten year old niece was getting baptized in Michigan. A big spiritual landmark for her, right? Well during the whole car ride to the church, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law were having a total fight. It was one of the worst they had had in front of the kids. They kept bickering back and forth and were in no mood to celebrate this happy occasion.

By the time they got to church, they were so upset that they weren't even speaking to each other. They took their seats, and then they started singing the first worship song. And something happened right then. The Holy Spirit came flooding over them with conviction about how they'd been treating each other, and it broke the impasse. They both started to cry and things changed between them right on the spot. Jon looked at Heidi and said, "I do love you." And they reconciled. And because of that, they said the rest of the service was the best, most meaningful time of worship they had experienced in a long time.

So I would say, don't let conflict become an excuse for not talking to God. Come before him just as you are, and the experience of getting in front of him will help you know what you need to do. He will prompt you.

The second gift you could miss in these verses is that **revisiting can be redeeming**. We have permission to go back and revisit unresolved stuff from our past. Sometimes we'd rather not, but it is a blessing to know that if we want healing, it's available. Just because we messed up or missed a moment doesn't sentence us to a lifetime of having to live with that. We can go back and do something about it. Sometimes when we miss a chance, we move that incident over to the category of regret. Regret is a no-man's land, a place where we feel badly about something but have no course of action to change anything.

God encourages us to not leave our disagreements there. It's not that we can undo the past, but choosing reconciliation will make the present and future better. Our pride or fear might make us reluctant to do anything. But there is no invisible timeline for reconciliation – God gives us the gift of being able to go back after the fact and redeem the situation.

What is involved in doing that? Pia Mellody is an author and expert on the subject of healing from trauma, and she broke it down in a way that I find helpful. She says healthy reconciliation and forgiveness boils down into three primary choices:

Feeling and owning the truth. Acknowledge what happened. Reconciling something is NOT denying it happened. You can't heal a wound you pretend doesn't exist. If it hurts, let yourself feel the pain. Find a way to express or articulate the emotion. Be honest

about your anger or disappointment or grief and take the time to work through how it impacted you.

The deeper the wound, the longer it takes to do that. Some hurts are relatively superficial and feeling them for too long turns into wallowing. But things that go back to childhood or your parents can take years to work through and may even require professional help to unpack. Where there has been trauma or chronic relationship issues, I would highly encourage you to seek out a good Christian counselor who has the tools to walk through that.

Sometimes in reconciliation, it isn't so much about feeling the pain as it is owning your responsibility for it. Don't try to explain yourself or rationalize what you did or downplay it – take responsibility and go about what it takes to address the consequences and make amends. Owning it means allowing the other person to feel their anger and hurt. Owning it means letting them decide what they need from you to make it right.

Once you have felt it or owned it, the next step is to *commit to not replaying it*. When I said earlier it was okay to revisit things from the past, I did not mean it's okay to dredge up the past and obsess over it. Once we have worked out our feelings about what happened, we need to let it go.

When we keep replaying the problem, it stirs up the old anger and resentment over and over and we can't move on. Part of reconciliation is to make the conscious decision to turn off the tape in our minds.

A third step of reconciliation is when we *decide to not seek revenge*. This is a huge one. Revenge sounds like an extreme form of retaliation, but it's really just about getting back at someone. And we all have ways of punishing each other. Maybe we cut off communication with them. Maybe we try to make them pay for what they did and suffer the way we have. Reconciliation happens when we make up our mind that we're not going to do the very thing we have every right to do.

I like how concrete those steps are and the fact that I can take them regardless of the other person. That leads into another gift I see in what Jesus had to say about reconciliation, and that is this: **Everyone can be empowered**. Jesus told his followers that they should think about "if your brother has something against you." That makes it sound like the person holding the grudge, the person who is actually being difficult is the other individual. What about when it's the other person who should be saying they're sorry?

If we are the victims of someone else's anger or hate or meanness, we can feel helpless and stuck when they don't own it. But reconciliation gives us the tools to live in freedom regardless of what the other person does. We get to make the first move.

No one ever likes to make the first move. It feels like it is letting the other person win if we blink first. So we dig in our heels and wait for that apology that never comes. We

hold out for being right or being understood. St. Augustine prayed, “O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always vindicating myself.”

When we adopt that posture of vindication, we’re only hurting ourselves. The Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom wrote this about people she had met who had not chosen reconciliation:

Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed bitterness remained invalids. It was a simple and horrible as that.

Reconciliation doesn’t wait for the other person to ask for forgiveness – it offers it, understanding that it is as much for our own health as it is for the other person.

Jesus gives us all these tools to help us reconcile – worship that wakes us up, the gift of getting to revisit and redeem the past, and the chance to be empowered when we feel victimized. All the same, reconciliation is excruciatingly difficult to do. Why is that?

A big part of that is the way we all react when we’ve been hurt by someone else. Karin has spent many years working with a Christian organization called Confident Kids. It is a curriculum based support group for elementary age children and their parents for when a family is going through a stressful situation, whether that’s a move, a divorce, a death in the family or some other major life change.

This past fall, we had the chance to offer it to some of our New Day families. The unit was all about feelings and feelings defenses that make reconciliation difficult. The truths in it are so universal and so pertinent to our discussion this morning that I’ve asked Karin if she would come and share them with you this morning. Because no matter what age we are these defenses impact our relationships.

KARIN

All of these defenses we use that block our communication with one another are the same defenses we use against God. We shut him out and put up walls because to engage him means feeling our stuff and owning the truth, which is that we need to change.

It brings us back around to our opening verses. Jesus says there is a link between worship and reconciliation. We come before God and are awakened to our need to repair a relationship. We go and revisit the situation. We take the first step of forgiveness and letting it go.

And then Jesus gives us one more gift, because he invites us back into worship. And when we’ve gone through the process of reconciliation, we have different understanding as we enter worship. Because **practice can bring perspective.**

When we've had to face the difficult task of reconciliation for ourselves, it makes us realize the enormity of what God has done for us. He's the one who has taken the first step to make things right between us and him.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

What we go through on a small scale to bring reconciliation God has done on a huge scale for the whole world. If we think it's costly for us with our individual relationships, imagine multiplying that by billions and putting it all on Jesus.

That's what the cross was all about. Christ went through the entire reconciliation process. He felt all our pain and owned our stuff. Isaiah says he carried our sorrows and bore our guilt.

Now that Jesus has dealt with our sin, he is committed to not replaying it.

Jeremiah 31:34

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

The devil likes to remind us over and over of our failures, but when we've brought it to the cross and dealt with it, God forgets it. He gives us that clean slate to start over. And in doing so, he also consciously chooses not to seek revenge.

Psalms 103:10

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

There's a story from when Nelson Mandela became prime minister in South Africa. He worked very hard to reach out to the white community that had oppressed blacks for so long. One of the first things he did was invite all the widows of the former white prime ministers to a lunch as a symbol of his desire to put the past behind. In that group, he included Betsie Verwoerd, the widow of the prime minister who had thrown him in prison for all those years. It was an incredibly gracious gesture. She declined his invitation and then casually mentioned he could stop by for tea sometime if he felt like it.

So that's exactly what he did. Nelson Mandela took his 200 plus person entourage to the little all-white town where Betsie lived and sat down for tea with this 94 year old woman. There was nothing political or financial she could do for him – he just wanted to build a bridge.

I love that story because to me it's a miniature picture of God's relentless efforts to reconcile with us. Even though he was the one wronged, he took all the responsibility for

making it right on himself. He didn't wait for our apology. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God forgave us before we ever made a move.

And just like Mandela pulling into town with his huge staff just to have tea with a little old lady who had nothing to offer him, God has gone over and above in an extravagant way to reach us. We had nothing to offer him, but he wanted friendship with us anyway.

Some of you are here this morning and you're still not feeling like you're on the same page as God. The books feel unbalanced. The good news is that he's done the reconciling from his end. He's covered the difference out of his account. All we have to do is thank him for it and accept it.

Maybe you've done that, but as you're worshipping here this morning, you've become aware of a need to go and be reconciled to your brother – or sister or mother or father or husband or wife or child or friend. Whether relationship with them is still possible or not, you always have the ability to feel and own the past, to stop replaying it and to choose not to take revenge.

What step of reconciliation are you needing to take today? What defenses have gotten in your way? Everyone has the power to tell the truth and break the cycle and find freedom.