

Getting to Step Six (A Lenten Devotion)



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Co-missioners,

Over the past two weeks you caught Ed Schroeder grinding his teeth about “the peace-and-justice mantra,” as he called it. Today we send a related piece in a different genre—so different that we’re obliged here to point out the connection to Ed’s

work. For that we call on your familiarity with the six-step Crossings matrix. If you're foggy on that, we urge you to [consult our website.](#)

The doing of peace and justice or anything else that Christians see as their vocation in the world is a Step Six issue, as we call it, where Step Six invites our reflection on the outward behavior that might arise from faith (Step Five) in the accomplishments of Christ crucified (Step Four). Among the greatest problems with current peace-and-justice thinking is its failure to anchor its exhortations in that great doing of Christ. Behind this lies the further problem of sorely underplaying what Christ in fact did, the odd assumption being that sinners have never been in big enough a pickle with God to require so massive a doing.

But more on this in a future pile on to Ed's essay.

For now we send you an effort to invite Christian behavior as St. Paul once did—Peter and John too, for that matter—by anchoring the invitation squarely in the astonishment of the cross. It comes in the form of a brief Lenten devotion, emphasis on “brief,” that took place over Zoom last night under the auspices of Messiah Lutheran Church in Fairview Park, Ohio. Our editor, Jerry Burce, continues as senior pastor there until the end of this coming July. He penned the devotion. It unfolds in two parts. The first explores the overall theme for this year's Lenten series: “Reconciled! So Let's...” The second touches on the night's specific topic: “Let's Obey.” This might be of particular interest to anyone who has haggled over the years about “the third use of the Law.” Jerry threads the needle of this argument, or so he thinks, and will happily entertain any comment about that.

Peace and Joy,

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A Lenten Devotion in Two Parts

by Jerome Burce

I. Reconciled! So Let's...

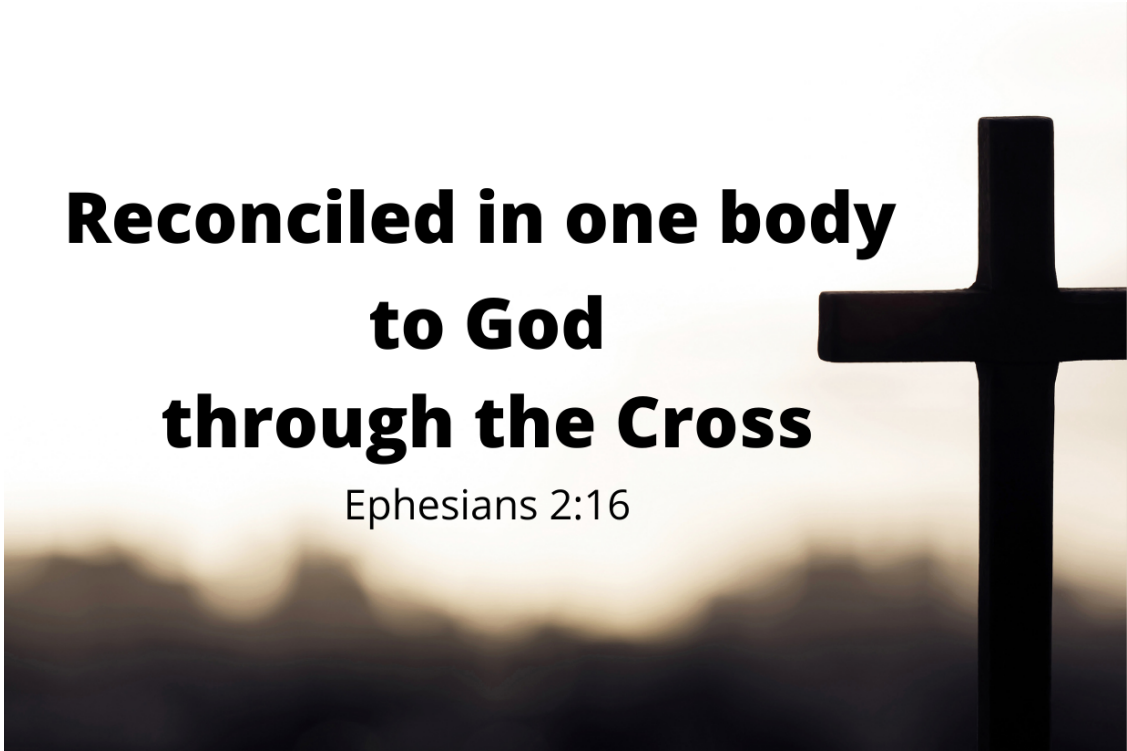
We're going to talk and pray this Lent about two words.

The first is reconciled. That's reconciled as in "all sorted out." It's reconciled as in "no hard feelings," "no lingering fears," "no leftover issues," "no festering resentments."

Reconciled is where you are when all the bones are buried. There's nothing left to pick over or argue about.

Reconciled: that how God is on his side of things as he looks at us tonight. We heard him say so last week, on Ash Wednesday.

God is reconciled to us tonight because Jesus made it happen. He paid the price. He cleaned up the books. When he died on our behalf he made the advance payment that will cover the sins we commit tomorrow. Imagine that.



Reconciled in one body to God through the Cross

Ephesians 2:16

I can tell you even now that when you go to sleep tomorrow night, God for God's part will be at perfect peace with you.

And should the sleep you sleep become a permanent sleep, you can count on a resurrection just like Christ's. That's how good you've got it where God is concerned. That's how reconciled God is to you on Jesus' account.

Not that any of us believe this too well. If we did, we wouldn't find ourselves picking bones with God the way we do. We wouldn't accuse him of letting us down. We wouldn't bother with the hypocrite's game we heard about last week, the one that has us forever pretending to be better than we are. The one that hides our deep-seated fears that we're just not good enough.

You, for your part: be reconciled to God as God is to you. We heard that through St. Paul last week. It's another way of urging us to trust the Gospel; to count on God to have our backs for Jesus' sake, no matter what.

We're going to pray for this faith during these weeks of Lent. We're going to pray for it together because we all need it; because God deserves it.

We'll pray for it because there's no point whatsoever in fighting and quibbling with somebody who's all done fighting and quibbling with us.

And there's something else we'll pray for this Lent.

We'll pray for eyes that are starting to see what life looks when God Almighty is in your corner. We'll talk and think together about things we get to do when it starts to sink in that God is our friend. We'll practice making another word a fixture of our Christian vocabulary.

The word is "Let's." "Let's" as in the everyday way of saying "let us."

"Let's" as in "why not"? "Let's" as in "C'mon, let's go for it!"

This is "let's," as in the direct opposite of the middle-schooler's whine. "Must we?" he says. "Do we really *have* to?" she adds.

It's "let's" as in the word you use when you're inviting a friend to join you in a grand adventure.

The adventure in this case is the grandest of them all. It's the one St. Thomas invited his friends into when he said of Jesus, "Let us also go with him, so that we may die with him."

Let's all die with Jesus this Lent as we die to our folly, our fears, our unbelief.

Let's rise with Jesus this Lent as we explore how good life gets when we're reconciled to God for his sake—as, in fact, we are

this very night.

II. Let's Obey

As we think this Lent about the grand adventure life becomes when you're reconciled to God, we'll use the catechism as our guide. There's not a better one to be found.

So we start tonight with the commandments, the great ten that are sometime boiled down to the great two. Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself.

"Thou shalt," it said, in the old English of the Bibles, hymns and catechisms that some of us grew up with. Honest people wince when you put it like that. There's simply no way I'll love the Lord my God tomorrow the way I must, the way I have to. There's no point at all in pretending that I will. As for the neighbor—well, forget it.



But suppose I don't have to do this. Suppose instead that I get to do this, that I want to do this—that I want, at least, to practice doing it.

Go ahead, says Christ—the Jesus who loved the Lord his God with

all his heart, soul, strength and mind. With every drop of his life's blood given and shed for your sake, for mine.

Go ahead, says Christ—the same Jesus who loved heaps of perfectly awful neighbors as you and I could never begin to.

Go ahead, says Christ, and have a shot at my kind of loving. Will you get it right? Of course not, or at least not until my Spirit is all done with you and you're reveling with saints and angels in the age to come.

But in the meantime, give it a shot, says Jesus. How could you not?

How could you not practice loving the God who loves you so well that he calls you reconciled—the child of his heart with whom he's exquisitely pleased to the point of extravagance?

As for the neighbor, awful though she be, how (says Jesus) could you not at least try to love somebody I found lovely enough to die for, as I died for you?

So let's do it. Let's give it a shot. Let's practice obeying what Jesus tells us again this Lent.

To “obey” means simply this: that you listen, as in really, really listen, to the point that what you hear begins to shape what you do.

Turns out that all kinds of marvelous things when people listen this way with ears tuned to Jesus.

They become signs of the future that God is busy making for this world he loved to the extreme of Jesus' death.

They refresh the lives of people they spend their days with. They file off the edges of loneliness and pain. They soften the

world's bitterness and sorrow with some genuine hope.

Let's all practice the ways of love this Lent. Let's honor and obey our Lord of love.

Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use
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