

Reflections on Reconciliation and Lent

“So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Using the language from this letter from Paul to the Christians in Corinth, the Prayer Book describes the good news of Christ’s work in the world as “establishing the new covenant of reconciliation” between God and human beings. It’s also one of the four qualities that the catechism lists to describe our ministries as lay persons. We are, “according to the gifts given (us), to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world.” And it is the word used to describe the goal of penitence, the process of confessing our sins and receiving assurance of our forgiveness.

The word ‘reconciliation’ assumes three things:

- That which belongs together
- Which is broken
- And needs to be repaired and renewed

It’s a term used by St. Paul in his New Testament letters to describe the distinctive activity of God in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. By the Christ-event, according to Paul, God has taken a new initiative to draw human beings—despite our brokenness—back into renewed relationship with our creator. This new peace with God will be the basis of a new kind of peace among all God’s creatures; Jews and Gentile, lover and beloved, humanity and creation.

Clearly for Jesus, as for St. Paul, reconciliation also is about broken groups—families, congregations, nations—which belong together in deep and genuine community, but which are set against one another in enmity and pain and sometimes violence. We’ve often watched in sorrow and helplessness as families fall apart, parishes split into factions, or nations drift angrily into civil war or armed conflict. The reconciliation of communities, difficult or indeed impossible as it may seem, is a part of Christ’s work of reconciliation and a part of our ministries of God’s people.

This is why the Prayer Book so intimately links (1) What we pray about reconciliation and atonement (2) with what we pray and do about repentance and forgiveness.

The first step in receiving as our own this gracious gift that God has made to us in Christ is the step of repentance—which the Prayer Book calls the “Rite of reconciliation.” Until we confess that we have wanted and tried to be something other than what God made us to be, then we cannot begin living into the reality that God has waiting for God’s people. To be “at-one-d” or reconciled is to be forgiven for having done all those things that break apart our community with having done all those things that break apart our community with God and one another. It is to be recreated—to begin again as God’s creatures. And we begin again each time we confess and repent turning away from our sins, turning back toward God’s way for us and receiving the power of the Spirit to amend our lives and make us whole with God and one another.

Blessings be upon you these last weeks of Lent, Nancy+