

“Loved, Forgiven, Reconciled”

Matthew 5:21 – 26

Will Campbell grew up in the heart of poor, rural Mississippi. He went to Wake Forest University and Yale Divinity School and then became a Baptist minister. Later he served as chaplain at both the University of Mississippi and Yale University. It was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties when Will Campbell met P. D. East, a newspaper publisher.

A Roman Catholic priest from Chicago and an Episcopal seminary student from Cambridge, Massachusetts had just been murdered in Alabama and P. D. East used the tragic event to express his opinions about what was wrong with the world and particularly what was wrong with the church. After a long conversation between the two men, P. D. East said to Will Campbell, “Just tell me what this Jesus is all about. I’m not too bright, but maybe I can get the hang of it. Keep it simple. In ten words or less, what is the Christian message?” Will Campbell replied, “We’re all sinners, but God loves us anyway.” “That’s only eight words,” said P. D. East, “you’ve got two more, would you like to try again.” Will Campbell stuck to his eight-word definition, whereupon P. D. East asked; “Those two men who were murdered because they were trying to help people, were they sinners?” “Yes, they were sinners like us all,” Campbell replied. Then P. D. East asked cynically, “Which one of those two sinners did God love most?” Well, God loves everyone infinitely. God loves everybody equally. So that means loved by God! And if loved, forgiven! And if forgiven, reconciled by faith in him.

The purpose of the church is all wrapped up in the message: God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. God gave his only Son to show us how much he loves us and what he had to offer us.

In (Matthew 5: 23 – 24) Jesus said to his followers: “...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.” Jesus also taught us to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Just as God’s love and mercy are greater than the things that separate us from him, so too our love and mercy must be greater than the things that separate us from one another.

To forgive is to acknowledge that only love can overcome the evil that divides and alienates.

To forgive is to acknowledge that only love can heal our wounded relationships with one another.

To forgive is to acknowledge that only love can clear away the debris carried over from our unresolved past lives. Repent! We begin by clearing out the debris from the past that continues to separate us from God and neighbor.

Lord, forgive our self-righteousness; forgive all our half-hearted efforts to understand the problems of others; forgive all those times we were too busy to listen. Forgive when

we are unkind to other human beings; forgive us for using and exploiting others. As the church of Jesus Christ, forgive us our failure to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel effectively, both in word and deed. In (John 14: 6), Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

He did not say, "I shall tell you the way" so we can learn about it or "I shall show you the way" so we can seek it; Jesus said, "I am the Way," so we can find it when we come to him.

He did not say, "I shall tell you the truth" so we can be informed or "I shall show you the truth" so we can be enlightened; Jesus said, "I am the Truth," so we can have it when we come to know him.

He did not say, "I shall tell you of the life" so we can be aware of it or "I shall show you the life" so we can desire it; Jesus said, "I am the Life," so we can live it when we come to life in him.

We cannot come to him, we cannot come to know him, and we cannot come to life in him with unforgiving hearts. A long-term unforgiving heart will be the source of an unhappy, wasted life. We cannot control another person's life. If we are carrying an unforgiving spirit and we come to the altar with our gift, Jesus will say, "first be reconciled to your brother (or sister or parent or child or friend or neighbor or enemy) and then come and offer your gift."

There is an old Indian saying that says, "If you want to understand someone else, you must walk a mile in the other person's moccasins." To be the kind of persons Christ wants us to be we must empathize, put ourselves in the other person's place, feel the other person's pain, sense the other person's need. We need to listen to the other person. We need to try to understand, to call forth the best from the other person, to forgive and to accept forgiveness. Remember the Christian message, "We're all sinners but God loves us anyway."

Loved - - by God - - - and if loved, forgiven - - - and if forgiven, reconciled!

Pastor Garry Culler