

Reconciliation. That's the big theme for the day. Reconciliation is what Ash Wednesday's all about. That's what Lent is all about.

Reconciliation is bringing together two parties that are estranged, two parties that have been separated. Reconciliation is the healing of a divided and broken relationship.

In the Episcopal Church's catechism, reconciliation is the mission of the church. It states, "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."<sup>1</sup> Restoring unity. Reconciliation. That's what we're all about.

In our Epistle lesson, Paul is very forthright: "We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2Cor 5:20)."

Be reconciled to God. That would imply that our relationship with God is broken. How might that happen?

Let's think in purely human terms for a few minutes. There are really two basic ways that relationships are broken. Way #1 is when you just drift apart. Maybe you had a friend you went to school with. But then you grew up and moved on and you haven't seen them in years. At most you might send them an annual Christmas card. But that's it. You never see them or talk to them. We all have these kinds of relationships. Once you were friends. You never intentionally ended the friendship. But you just drifted apart.

If this describes your relationship with an old friend, that's one thing. But if this describes your relationship with God, then you've got a serious problem. If so, Paul has an answer for you. "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation (2Cor 6:2)."

Relationships don't just happen. You have to work at them. The same thing goes for your relationship with God. Now is the time you can do something about it. During Lent, reestablish the connection. Devote some time to the disciplines of prayer and Bible study. Be intentional. Spend time with God. Reconnect. That's Way #1.

Way #2 is tougher. Again let's use a human analogy. Suppose you had a good friend who was your business partner. But then your partner cheated you in some sort of business dealing. If this happened, you wouldn't just drift apart. Your relationship would be broken by their bad actions.

For the relationship to be healed two things would have to happen. First, the guilty party would need to be up front about admitting their guilt and asking your forgiveness. They might even need to make financial restitution. And second, you as the aggrieved party would need to accept their apology and work at healing the relationship also. Without both things happening, there would be no reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> BCP p. 855

This is what sin does to our relationship with God. Our bad actions cause a breach in the relationship. For healing to occur, two things have to happen. First, we have to admit our guilt, and confess our sinfulness. We might even need to pay God back. But how can we do that?

The truth is you can't. There's nothing you have that God needs. There's no legal tender you can use to pay reparations to God for breaking that relationship. How can you repay an infinitely holy God for breaking an infinitely loving relationship? You just can't.

But the Good News for us is that God has already paid the price on our behalf. As Paul said in our Epistle, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2Cor 5:21)." For our sake, Jesus took our sins upon himself, so that we might take upon ourselves his perfect and right relationship with God.

We still need to repent. But God has already made restitution. And the second part of the equation is, God always stands ready to forgive. Come before God in repentance, and he will have mercy. That is good news indeed.

This is Lent. Now is the acceptable time. If you've drifted away from God, reconnect. If you've broken the relationship with God, ask forgiveness. 'We beseech you brothers and sisters, be reconciled to God.' Confess your sins. Turn to God. And he will have mercy.