

Be Reconciled: *Matthew 5:23-24 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

October 4, 2015, World Communion Sunday, Year B (Also, Reconciliation Offering Sunday)

There's a scene in the movie *Toy Story*. Woody, the cowboy toy come to life, and his fellow toy, Buzz Lightyear, is lost inside the home of the next-door neighbor kid, Sid. All he wants is to get back home, back to Andy's room, where all his toy friends are; where he is safe. But going from one house to another is a bit of a chore for a toy. Especially a toy stuck in Sid's room.

Sid...well, Sid is one of those kids. Playing, for Sid, is all about seeing how far he can shoot a toy on a rocket, or how many pieces he can tear his sister's Barbie doll into. Sid is a toy's nightmare.

In this scene, Buzz has fallen to Sid's floor, and his arm has broken off. Woody goes to rescue him, when a bunch of scary, mixed-up toys emerge from under Sid's dresser.

There's a spider with a baby doll head. A wrestler with a duck head and a spring for legs. A toy fishing reel with barbie doll legs. A strange, and creepy mess of mismatched, put-back-together toys. They begin to pull Buzz into the darkness. Woody is confident they are cannibal toys, and Buzz's days as a toy have ended.

But then...well, then, instead of eating Buzz, they repair him. See, that's their mission. In the darkness of Sid's room, they have put back together themselves and all the broken pieces of Sid's carnage, creating a strange, reconciled community of broken and discarded toys. Don't you like that?

Okay, it's a little cheesy. It's a kid's movie, I know. But this scene has been playing through my mind this week as I think about our theme today: "Be Reconciled."

We read earlier, "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."

I'm confident the Apostle Paul didn't see *Toy Story*, and who knows if the creators of *Toy Story* read Paul, but these forgotten, broken toys...this is exactly what Paul had in mind when he calls us to "be ministers of reconciliation."

From the mess of their brokenness, they have become a new creation. Our world needs ministers of reconciliation. Because our world is a lot like Sid's room.

But our problem isn't broken toys. From the streets of Ferguson to the streets of Baltimore. From the pews at Mother Emmanuel Church, to the classrooms at a Community College in Oregon. From refugees and immigrants around the world, fleeing

violence and poverty as they desperately search for safety and life. From stump speeches across Iowa that lead to hate-speech against minority students at ISU. From racism and classism and homophobia, and the indifference to the life of the other that is so common in our self-absorbed society...

We are broken.

Last week, Pope Francis made news as he calmly and peacefully stood in places of power in our own country, and called for us to treat everyone with respect and dignity.

When he spoke to Congress, he said that the role of an elected representative is to represent the people, not play the power games of politics as you push one's own divisive platforms.

He said: "You are called to defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good, for this is the chief aim of all politics."

And yet, in the wake of his visit, we keep trying to pigeonhole the Pope on the right or the left. It's almost humorous to see the pundits debate whether or not Pope Francis was trumpeting the Republican party's platform or the Democratic party's platform. As if Pope Francis, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, an Argentinian man who now lives in Rome, would care to chose a side in America's partisan bickering.

We are broken.

We talk about the other, but we don't talk to the other. We listen to what "experts" may say about the other, but we don't listen to the other. And I'm not just talking about politics. We do this in churches. Neighborhoods. Among different races. Among our families.

Us against them.

We draw the whole world into these two categories--us and them--and we go to war against our sisters and brothers, fighting for our own interest, never compromising, winning at all costs.

And then we hear Jesus' words: "Be reconciled."

It's not a suggestion. It's a command. Be Reconciled.

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."

If you're heading to worship, don't go, until you've been reconciled.
 If you're about to sing a hymn, stop, and go be reconciled.
 If you're about to put money in the offering plate, but there is brokenness in your church, brokenness in your community--hold onto that offering, and go be reconciled.
 If you're walking to the communion table and there is brokenness in your relationships, first, go be reconciled.

These things we do together as church--they are very important. Our worship, our giving, our gathering around the table--this is central to our life as Disciples together. But more important than all of this, Jesus says, is reconciliation.

This is our primary ministry as church. This is our calling. Ministers of reconciliation. Ambassadors of peace.

We can't give into the the partisan games of our world. We can't buy into the us-against-them lie. Our world needs reconciliation.

And we are the ones called by God to put our broken world back together again.

<Go to the Communion Table>

Often, on World Communion Sunday, we celebrate the global nature of our community--that the Church, in all it's diversity, is one, and though there are many communion tables, we all gather at the one table of Christ.

That is true, and yet, not fully. Yes, we are one, but our oneness is not fully realized. We are divided and broken, and World Communion Sunday is a reminder of they way the world should be, and a call for us to go out and make it so.

The very first World Communion Sunday was held in 1933, at the Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA. Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr was the pastor, and created the service as a way to pull the churches in his neighborhood together in common mission. Soon, his entire region adopted the practice, and eventually the entire Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterians called other denominations to join them, and soon the service became a yearly practice on the first Sunday of every October, where Christians from various denominations would focus on their oneness, and then go out and make it so.

Dr. Kerr's son, the Rev. Donald Kerr, was 13 at the time of that first World Communion Sunday, and reflected years later on the service and how it spread around the nation:

"The concept spread very slowly at the start," he said. "People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Wide Communion symbolized the effort

to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“We were trying to hold the world together.” I like that.

That’s our mission. The people who hold the world together. Ministers of reconciliation.

Every week, when we gather around our communion table, we say that “All are Welcome.” And we mean it. Yet, Jesus’ remind us that though all may be welcome, all are not here.

And we cannot be satisfied simply saying the words. We must go out and make it a reality, as we put back together relationships. As we heal brokenness and division. As we bring those who have been pushed out or kept away, and make a place for them at the table of our Lord.

For at this table, Jesus places his broken body into our hands, and calls us to put the pieces back together again.

One of the earliest prayers of the church was this communion prayer:

*Just as this broken loaf was scattered over the hill as grain,
and, having been gathered together, became one;
in like fashion, may your church be gathered together
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Amen.*

Let us now stand and join in the singing of our communion hymn, which was taken from the words of this ancient prayer, “Seed, Scattered and Sown”, #395.