

Ministry of Reconciliation

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Preacher: Andy Prideaux

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of August 2004. The preacher is Andy Pridot. His sermon is entitled Ministry of Reconciliation and is based on 2 Corinthians 5.11-6.2.

It's wonderful to be able to share with you from God's Word this morning. And I just wanted to say before we look at 2 Corinthians that Ness and I really appreciate your partnership in the Gospel. We're link missionaries, as you know. It might seem a bit strange to be missionaries yet living and working in Melbourne, but we're home missionaries, I guess you'd call us, deployed at Melbourne University, working with Christian Union there, and the 30,000 or so students who are there keeps us busy sharing the Gospel and teaching God's Word.

But we thank you for your fellowship, your partnership in the Gospel, in that work and your prayers and, yeah, the giving of this church. Why don't we pray now that God would help us as we come to his Word together.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you again for bringing us together this morning. Thank you for the fellowship that we can enjoy in the Gospel.

[1 : 19] Thank you that you speak to us in your Word about your Son, the Lord Jesus. Please teach us more of Him today, what it means to trust in Him and to live with Him as our Lord and Saviour.

And we pray it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, a little boy growing up in the industrial city port of Liverpool, England, in the 1940s and 50s, went to the picture theatre one Saturday afternoon and his life was changed forever.

The black and white film that he saw was Jailhouse Rock starring Elvis Presley. Some of you may have seen that when it came out. Unfortunately, I wasn't there. It would have been a great moment. But the boy looked up at the screen and saw something that he'd never seen before, images of freedom, of passion and raw energy and presence that sort of leapt off the screen into the theatre. And all the girls in the cinema were screaming. It was only a film, but they were screaming nonetheless. And it was at that moment that John Lennon, founder of the greatest band of all time, I hope no one will contest that, the Beatles saw something that he'd never seen before. It was just a film, but it changed his life and it shaped the direction for the rest of his life. He was captured by it. His life was shaped by that love that had captured him, that consumed him.

[2 : 34] And it drove him on, whatever the consequences to his life, to his health, to his relationships. He believed that he had no choice but to pursue that dream. He'd been caught by what he saw.

A century earlier in the same country, perhaps England's greatest novelist ever, Charles Dickens, had also been captured. But he'd been captured by his need to write what he saw, to get to the bottom of people in their poverty or in their wealth, to expose the hypocrisy of the society of his day, to celebrate the spirit of those who struggled on the face of the tragedies of life, to mourn the futility of life in the face of death that was all too prevalent around him.

And he worked incredible hours, churning out thousands and thousands of pages by hand, seemingly oblivious to his own family around him. His wife, who bore him nine children, suffered terribly from undiagnosed depression and she became an encumbrance to him.

Eventually he would find another muse, an actress half his age. He became obsessed with her, eventually sending his wife away and hardly ever seeing his children. He worked harder and harder until eventually he basically died of exhaustion, almost with the pen still in his hand.

Dickens had been captured by his love for writing, his need to write, and that love controlled him. What we love captures us.

[3 : 56] It controls us. It influences the way we use our time, the way we view other people, the way we approach each day, the way we plan for the future, the way we spend our money and ultimately the way we die.

And of course as Christians we know, don't we, that what we love has eternal consequences because God will judge the living and the dead. That means that what we love will either destroy us ultimately or bring us life.

Now in 2 Corinthians, especially today's passage, Paul tells us what it is that is captured that compels him, what it is that urges him on. Verse 14 is a nice summary of this.

For the love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them.

And as we read this passage, we're going to see how this love that he is confident that Christ has for him, has for all of his people in fact, shapes everything about the apostle.

[5 : 01] His life, his view of death, his view of other people, the way he carries out his ministry. And the question we'll be asking of ourselves is, what is it that drives us? What is it that compels you, that urges you on?

For a start, why are you guys here? I was asking that question at the 8 o'clock service that seemed even more pertinent than things. It's a very early time to get up on Sunday morning when it's very cold. What would drive you to do that week by week?

Or what drives you to give up so much of your time to serve others, to be on committees, or to lead Bible studies, or to lead Sunday school, or to look after people in whatever way that might be? What motivates you?

Is it the love of Christ? Or is it something else? And how would you be able to tell anyway? Well, Paul Dudley, that is, has been taking us through 2 Corinthians, and maybe we'll just briefly recap what we've seen in chapter 5 so far.

First up, the apostle Paul showed us that what it's like to be a Christian, in part at least, waiting for Jesus to return, is that it's a time of groaning. We're all meant to be groaning. I can't hear many groans today, but that's what we're meant to be doing, yearning for an eternal embodied existence, to have this mortality swallowed up by life.

[6 : 11] This life, this body we now live in, is the equivalent of a tent, Paul said, like a temporary dwelling place, while Christians yearn for is the permanence of their heavenly body, the fulfilment of their salvation, in that sense.

But this yearning for a certain future, guaranteed by Jesus' own resurrection, doesn't sort of make us do nothing in the present. Christians shouldn't be open to the charge that we're so heavenly minded, we're of no earthly use.

No, this motivates us to a life of trusting obedience to God. And now Paul goes on in verse 11, on page 940 of your Pew Bibles, verse 11, Now Paul might seem a little bit defensive to you in these verses.

In a way he is. He is continually defending his ministry as an apostle in this letter. And in fact, that's the main reason why he writes this letter to Corinth.

Because you see, what's happened, the pastoral situation in Corinth is that leaders nicknamed super apostles by Paul later on, who are actually false apostles, have come into the church in Corinth, and they're unsettling the people's confidence in Christ's true apostle to the Gentiles, Paul.

[7 : 48] And so in the gospel, the words that Christ had given him to proclaim. They're saying things like this. Look at this guy, he's always struggling, he's always being persecuted, chased out of town, he's bold in his letters.

But when you meet him, he's a bit of a wimp actually. And look at his message, he preaches about a Messiah who was crucified. It's weakness, it's foolishness, anyone can see that. Where are the miracles?

Where's the glory? Where's the triumph? Where's the voice from the mountain? As in Moses' time. So Paul's aim in this letter is to restore the Corinthians' confidence in his ministry, and so in the message, and indeed the way of life that flows through receiving that message, that he preaches. And to that end in these verses here, verses 11 to 13, he invites them to look at how he goes about his work. And the first thing he wants them to see is that he carries out his ministry in God's presence.

That is, he's not motivated by what people think, but about what God thinks. It's God who he fears in that sense. He doesn't care about human judgments. The only judgment he has in view is the one that Jesus Christ will bring when he returns in glory.

[8 : 56] That's why he says, verse 11, therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others. And that comes directly after him just talking about the Lord Jesus coming as our great judge.

See, that's why he seeks to persuade people, verse 11, with the gospel, the good news about what Jesus has done for us. See, this is why he doesn't preach a more palatable or popular or intellectually impressive message.

Now, he invites the Corinthians to look at his life and that of his co-workers and to see that unlike the super apostles, he and his co-workers aren't on about appearances. They know that God is concerned about motivation.

They know that God sees what's going on in our hearts as we serve him, not just the amazing things we think we might be doing for him. They serve out of a genuine love for God and his people. Verse 12, See, whatever the false apostles are saying about Paul, the Corinthians, we can be confident that he carries out his ministry as one who is truly sent and authorised by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 13] And he goes on in verse 13, If we're beside ourselves, it is for God. If we're in our right mind, it's for you. Now, beside ourselves or being out of his mind is probably a reference to the kind of ecstatic experience that Paul had and briefly alludes to in chapter 12 where he describes being caught up to the third heaven, a passage far too difficult for me to understand.

I'll leave that for Paul Dudley to explain. He'll do a good job at that. But unlike the false apostles, you see, he could spend all of his time talking about these amazing experiences that he's had, but he only briefly alludes to it and then only to respond to critiques that have been levelled against him. He doesn't go on about these amazing experiences. Instead, what does he spend all of his time doing? He spends all of his time telling them about Jesus. His motto for ministry is very clear. It's found in his first letter to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 2.2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Now you see, any visions or out-of-mind experiences are between him and God.

When he's sharing with the Corinthians, he's in his right mind as it were. That is, he's doing what Christ commissioned him to do, appealing to their minds with the gospel, seeking to persuade them, verse 11, to the truth of Jesus.

[11 : 38] Now if this is true of Christ's apostle in his unique ministry of speaking and writing down God's words for future generations, what we now have as Holy Scripture, it should be true of God's people who then receive that word as we are today and then share it with others.

I think there's an implicit warning here. Watch out for Christian leaders who are more on about appearances than they are about what's in the heart.

Who are more concerned to tell you about their visions or their insights or the predictions that God has given supposedly only to them because the result of this is to lead people away from dependence on Christ alone to dependence on them, isn't it?

It's the stuff of gurus. It's the stuff of cults. That's one reason I think while we're encouraged at Holy Trinity to listen to sermons with our Bibles open which might seem a bit of a strange thing.

You're like me, you grew up in the Anglican Church. What's all this opening the Bible, listening to a sermon stuff? Well, we need to come under God's Word together, don't we, and test what we hear by the Scriptures whether it's Carol preaching or whether it's Paul Dudley or Paul Barker or Peter Adam or the Archbishop or whoever it is.

[12 : 49] We need to ask ourselves the question, is Christ being preached faithfully from the Scriptures? Is that what God is saying? And am I being encouraged to trust in Him alone?

And if you're in leadership in whatever way that might be, leading Sunday school or leading a Bible study or just sharing with someone one-to-one from God's Word, we need to make sure that it is gospel ministry that we're doing.

That is sharing the message of Christ and Him crucified and raised from the dead. Not preaching ourselves but Christ. Not making disciples for ourselves but for Jesus.

Not making people dependent upon us in a mentoring or a counselling situation but ultimately dependent upon Christ. Well, the fullest explanation of why Paul does what he does despite

suffering, unpopularity and even persecution comes in verse 14 here.

Let me read it. For the love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that one has died for all therefore all have died. And He died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who died and was raised for them.

[14:02] From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view we know Him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ there is new creation.

Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new. Don't know if anyone here is interested in archaeology just a little bit.

It's very interesting. You've seen archaeological digs on Roman sites from the first century around the time that this letter was written. They've actually found anti-Christian graffiti. It's not just a 20th century invention.

It's nothing new under the sun. And what they've found etched into stone or something there is the picture of a man who's been crucified but with the head of a donkey. And another man bowing down to it with the inscription Alexamenos worships his God.

You see, the Romans are sending up ridiculing these silly Christians for worshipping something that happened every day. Someone being crucified and calling him God, calling him a king or something like that.

[15:04] What did Paul say in his first letter to the Corinthians? Chapter 1. The message of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. And that's exactly what it was to Paul or Saul before his conversion.

Paul was compelled then by a passionate desire not to preach this message but to wipe it out and all the fools who believed in it violently or otherwise. That's what he says in some of his letters. It's the description given in Acts. But an amazing change came about in his life. And it came about when God got hold of him and changed the way that he viewed Jesus and his death on the cross. Listen again to verse 16. From now on therefore we regard no one from a human point of view even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view we know him no longer in that way. Back in verse 14 the love of Christ urges us on because we're convinced that one has died for all therefore all have died. You see what controls what motivates what drives Paul to preach now is the love of Christ seen most clearly in his death on the cross for our sins.

[16:14] He became convinced and he started a life committed to convincing others that Jesus' death had significance for all people everywhere. Verse 14 One died for all therefore all died.

What does that mean? It's a little bit difficult but I think what it means is that Christ's death was no failure as the Romans thought the Jews perhaps thought but a victory. All people since the first man and in Adam are stuck in sin slaves to it condemned by God rightly because of it but through Christ's death through faith in what he's done for us there is a possibility of dying to sin and it's penalty that death can be done with you see in Jesus' death and also dying to the way of life that a natural sinful self-centeredness dictates one died for all therefore all died and Jesus was also raised from the dead of course that means that we can be raised with him from spiritual death so that we live for Jesus now not for ourselves and I think that's the point of verse 15 he died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them. You see no longer did Paul see Christ as a failed messianic pretender and his followers as heretics no Christ is the one who makes God's glorious future possible who takes away the curse of sin on a fallen creation that brings about who brings about a new creation and Christ's people who we also view differently now are those who through faith in him have died with him and been raised with him have been caught up in the new creation one day to be finally revealed in a new heaven and a new earth verse 16 from now on therefore we regard no one from a human point of view or according to the flesh even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view we know him no longer in that way so if anyone is in Christ there is new creation everything old has passed away see everything has become new now if we really grasp what Jesus loved and his death and resurrection means perhaps more correctly

I should say if God has grabbed hold of us in that message with that message with that reality so that this is what shapes and drives our lives now then it must change the way we view Jesus and other people no longer from a human point of view see Jesus can no longer just be another good teacher or a philosopher with some interesting ideas or the spokesman for a particular political cause he's the one who makes new creation possible who brings forgiveness who raises people

from spiritual and physical death who reconciles them to their maker and of course it must change the way we view other people and ourselves most importantly I guess our brothers and sisters in Christ this passage tells us we don't have to be confused about our true identity we are people who have died and been raised with Christ forgiven set free to live with him as our king as our boss we're part of what God is doing in the universe part of his new creation and so are your brothers and sisters who you sit next to week by week who you catch up with during the week people we're called to love and serve not used as the super apostles did probably in Corinth for financial gain because we don't live for ourselves now but for him who died and was raised for us

I hope it's our fervent prayer at Holy Trinity Doncaster that anyone joining us each week would see God's people honouring the Lord Jesus Christ trusting in his death and resurrection alone for forgiveness and for life and that they'd also see indeed experience the love of Christ spilling over into our lives as we love one another not playing worldly comparing games anymore seeing others as competitors that only produces envy or resentment on the one hand or pride on the other but instead people who are markedly different from the world around us in the way that we give of ourselves share our lives bear one another's burdens sharing in true fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ I thank God that that's been my experience our experience as a family of this church I thank God for the faith in Christ and love for all the saints so evident here and it's my prayer that we would continue in this way of life as we're continually reminded of and shaped by the love of Christ as we come under his word from the scriptures each week so that God by his Holy Spirit would instruct and change us we need to come back to the wider context of the letter remember this section is part of a bigger argument if you like or defence

[21 : 11] Paul defending his ministry which is really important for the Corinthians but it's also important for us because you see how we respond to Christ's apostle Paul this passage will tell us is a direct indicator of how we are responding to Christ himself verse 18 all this is from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us so we are ambassadors for Christ since God is making his appeal through us we entreat you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God really when Paul is describing his ministry and that of his co-workers in these verses he's telling them telling us about what

God has done verse 18 all this is from God this is God's idea and what is God on about he's on about reconciling people to himself people who've become alienated from God by their sin which just means they're ignoring God pretending as if he isn't their God as if they can run their lives their own way without him or rebelling against God that's what sin means and that of course describes the whole human race before God gets hold of us in the Lord Jesus and God does this great reconciling work through Christ our sin stands between us and a holy God who must judge it but what verses 19 and 21 tell us here is that instead of crediting our sin to our account and so judging us as we deserve he credits it to Christ judging him in our place it's an amazing exchange Christ gets our sin and the punishment we deserve because of that we get his righteousness and the blessing of reconciliation which follows that that's what

Jesus does when he dies on the cross for us so listen again to God's words through his apostle verse 18 God reconciled the world to himself in Christ how verse 19 God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting people's sins or trespasses against them more clearly than ever verse 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God the righteousness of God that's the opposite of being condemned by God that is instead of being condemned we're acquitted declared not guilty put in the right with God nothing now stands between the person who is in Christ and their maker we are reconciled to God that is the great and comforting truth of the gospel but this isn't the end of what God does in his great work of reconciliation in that he communicates and applies this victory to people's lives through his word which is carried by his messengers to people in the first place that's

Paul and the other apostles those who first wrote this message down what has become for us the New Testament of course the Holy Bible in other words the scriptures are what God has given not what people have invented but what God has given by his spirit through the apostles to affect our reconciliation to him this is this is the way he saves us so that Paul can save the gospel the message in Romans 1 that it is the power of God for the salvation for all who believe I think this is

what Paul is describing in verse 18 when he says all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation the us in this passage I think is a reference to the apostles in the first place and he's talking about his relationship to the church of Corinth indeed the church until Christ returns he's still our apostle if you like verse 20 so we are ambassadors for Christ again Paul the apostle speaking since God is making his appeal through us we entreat you on behalf of

Christ be reconciled to God to understand the strength of these words we need to understand the first century a bit stronger than the way we understand that or the way that term is used now an ambassador represented the direct interests of his or her sender so let's think of the king's ambassador but not only that they carried with them the sender's authority their job was to secure the sender's interest that is if you messed with the ambassador you were messing with the king if you accepted the ambassador you were accepting the king and whatever he was offering to you well Paul quotes from Isaiah 49 verse 8 in chapter 6 verse 2 we'll skip down to this for a moment before he says the Lord says at an acceptable time I have listened to you and on a day of salvation I have helped you see now is the acceptable time see now is the day of salvation see what [26 : 26] Paul is saying today with the message that Paul brings to these people which we receive in God's word to us in the scriptures the day of salvation is being announced it's a big claim Paul is saying that this gospel that he sometimes calls his gospel in his letters is no mere human invention when he speaks it it's like when Isaiah says thus says the Lord you stand the Lord is making his appeal through us so this might shock you a bit but I think that in this primary sense we as God's people are not ambassadors in this sense not with a capital A not ambassadors for Christ that was a role unique to the apostles Ephesians 2 verse 20 the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself the chief corner stone this is why we read their words now as

God's words to us it's what we've been doing today it's why even when Paul gives a real ripper of a sermon we don't go and get a copy and staple it up the back of our Bible and add it to the Bible no offense Paul I'm sure he wouldn't want that to happen he doesn't carry that kind of authority that's why the first application to us of this passage as it was for the Corinthians is to receive this message ultimately God's message through his servant his mouthpiece not in vain but in faith chapter 6 verse 1 as we work together with him we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain to believe this word as God's word to us to trust in this message to trust in the son who this message is about and get caught up in God's love for us in Christ to see that now today is the day of God's salvation and I want to say to you if that's something you've never done before if you've never thought about these things before if you've never thanked Jesus for dying for you today is the day don't leave today without talking to somebody about this and if it is something you've done before we need to keep doing it don't we keep trusting and keep living by

God's word of salvation through Christ whatever the false teachers of our day are saying to discredit the word we can trust in the truth the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ now having said that as I'm saying that and you're worried about me saying we're not ambassadors I can hear the keen evangelists amongst us I know there are many people going out door knocking and talking with their friends that there is a sense of course in which we do represent Jesus and his interests if you like that is in a secondary sense or with a little a if you want to put it that way because we do call on people to respond to this message we announce don't we every time we share the word with people today is the day of salvation that's what evangelism is it's a great encouragement to me too that we have right here the tool to be able to do that God convinces people through his word let's open up God's words with people the Bible and let God do his work of convincing people of changing people let's take God at his word and trust that he has the power and the desire to do that

I don't know if you've ever talked to someone and they've said to you well look Andy I would believe in God if he spoke to me directly if I got a lightning strike through the night sky that had my name up in the sky and said Andy stop what you're doing believe in me then I'd believe occasionally people say things like that to me well we can say can't we you don't have to wait any longer that excuse just doesn't hold water because God has spoken and he speaks his word to us today be reconciled to God this is a message we take onto our universities into our homes into our workplace into our community here at Doncaster to our families our friends be reconciled to God today is the day well John Lennon and Charles Dickens achieved incredible things they produced a body of work that

has redefined the way people write and perform music and literature they've entertained millions over the years you might even say that they gave us a deep insight which I think they did into the human condition and their understanding of character and being able to portray that but they were not controlled by the love of

Christ and they were ultimately consumed by and destroyed and in their lives destroyed others by the idols they had made through their worship of created things rather than the creator who gave them these amazing gifts in the first place when we are controlled by Christ's love we're not destroyed but liberated that's the message of 2 Corinthians 5 liberated from the fear of death liberated from the fear of judgment liberated from self-centered living liberated from the desire to manipulate people to use and to fulfill our own desires liberated to share in and to enjoy the new creation that God is bringing about liberated to discover that the very reason God made us and the whole universe was for the praise of his glory liberated to discover that we only become truly human when we are reconciled to God through Jesus death for our sins and his mighty resurrection and so begin a life that we live for eternity with the goal with the desire to please him alone and enjoy and share his perfect love forever let's pray father god we thank you for the great reminder in your word to us today of the amazing love of christ the love we've also been singing about and celebrating in this service today together father please help this love of christ in his death and resurrection to be what controls and shapes the way that we think and speak and act the way we relate to others the way we conduct ourselves and our families and at work in all our relationships father please help us to trust in this amazing love for us to be transformed by it to share this love with others and we ask it so that the name of the lord jesus may be honoured in our lives and in this church and we pray in his name amen