

**2 Corinthians 5:14-21 + We Represent Christ + Series: We Are His Witnesses**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY**  
**3rd Sunday after the Epiphany + 21 January 2018**

Every two years or four years or six years we and countless others gather at polling places to vote. We're not there to vote for the best chili recipe or for who should win whatever reality competition happens to be on TV. No, we vote for people to represent us in Congress, in the White House, in the Senate or more locally in the state legislature or on the town council. Now how well they represent us is always up for debate. Yet we vote for them to represent us and the people in our area to enact laws and policies on our behalf.

Elected officials aren't the only representatives out there. All around our world our nation has ambassadors—men and women specially chosen to represent our nation, our government, and our interests wherever they are assigned. The same goes for those nations with ambassadors representing them and their interests in Washington D.C. Ambassadors are given a certain amount of authority to convey messages and proposals on behalf of the country they represent to the government where they are assigned. They play a very important role in keeping clear lines of communication open between nations.

On a more local level, there are others who represent—for example, lawyers hired to represent people in court, salespeople who represent their companies, and advocates who represent people when it comes to health care, just to name a few. Even here in our congregation, the pastor is called to represent God or his people depending on the situation. People serving as representatives have a specific message and specific assignment on behalf of those they represent. They play a very important role as they speak or act on behalf of others.

This morning we're continuing our look at the mission work that God has given to each of us as Christians. Last week we saw how mission work gets started—with a simple invitation to friends and loved ones to **“come and see”** Jesus and enjoy what he has for them. Today the Apostle helps us to see our role in mission work. We don't just invite. **WE REPRESENT CHRIST.**

We find Paul writing to a group of Christians who had been dealing with a lot of different problems and difficulties in their midst. They had had a lot of issues and the outlook didn't look promising for their future, but the Lord had used Paul to encourage them in their struggles, to call them to repentance for the sins they allowed to go on in their midst, and to point them back to Jesus. With this second letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul rejoices in what God was accomplishing in their midst. God had worked through Paul's first inspired letter to lead them to repentance and to resolve many of their issues. Paul joyfully encourages them with a reminder of who they are and what God has done for them. In so doing, Paul helps them to see how becoming representatives of Christ has changed everything for them—their lives, their motivation, their mission, and their message.

Paul was a highly motivated, highly energetic person. He was always traveling places, teaching people, writing to fellow believers, or simply surviving a dangerous life and profession. He was always on the move, but he never stopped talking about Jesus with anyone who would listen to him. Combined with that energy was an unceasing eagerness to serve. Paul had a laser-like focus on what Jesus had called him to do—to take the gospel to the nations. So what was it that gave him such motivation to represent Jesus to the world? **“For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If one died for all, then all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.”**

Christ's love for the world compelled him to die for the sins of all people and then to rise again from the dead. That love of Christ compelled Paul to realize what he had been and what he had become. He was dead to sin, dead to his own sinful nature, dead to his old, self-serving ways, but Christ had made him alive, no longer living for himself, but for the sake of Christ.

Now some of us are more motivated than others, but are you always motivated to serve Jesus, to represent Christ? Sadly our natural attitude towards serving and representing Christ is often either hostile or lazy and always self-serving. When it comes to the choices you make, your natural instinct is to do what benefits you, to put your effort into getting what you want. Your sinful nature wants you to focus not on Christ's will, but on yours. “Do you really want to represent Jesus? Why not put yourself out there? Why not do what you want? Then you get the praise. You get the credit.” That kind of motivation comes naturally to every one of us, and that self-centered attitude comes out every day. Yet Christ's motivation is different and more powerful because it's not “What's in it for me?”, but “See what he's done for me!”

***“For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If one died for all, then all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.”*** Christ’s love changes your motivation! The death Jesus endured he endured for you, so you would die to sin. Because he died for you, you now stand acquitted of all your guilt before God—an acquittal guaranteed with Christ’s empty tomb. That’s why you don’t live for yourself anymore. Rather than a death sentence, you have been given life, and you live it for Christ who has given you life.

If you’ve died to sin and now live for Christ, then your worldview, your perspective changes. Paul writes, ***“From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”*** How Paul viewed the world changed dramatically when Jesus appeared to him in glory on the road to Damascus and converted him. Gone were the old, dead ways of trying to please God with his own obedience and trying to overcome his own guilt with effort. In their place was ***“a new creation”*** created through the saving work of Christ.

The love of Christ drastically changes how you and I look at one another and how we look at the people around us. Rather than view people only on the basis of what you see on the outside or as objects for personal gain, you see them from the perspective of the finished work of Christ. We no longer see them ***“from a worldly perspective”*** or in the ***“old”*** way. Instead, we see them through eyes made new in Christ. We see every soul, no matter who they are, as souls for whom Jesus died and rose again, and therefore souls who need to know about their Savior, who came to make them a new creation.

We even see Christ differently. Rather than see him in the old, worldly, self-serving way, we see how he has transformed us into his new creation. Rather than live as God’s enemies, we are now his representatives. Why? God sees us differently. ***“Everything 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 he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.”*** With that new perspective from his love for us, Christ changes our assignment, our service, our message as his representatives. We are to convey his ***“reconciliation”*** to people who are broken away from God.

Reconciliation is almost non-existent these days. With the government shutdown, reconciliation doesn’t seem to be anywhere on the horizon as both political parties constantly attack each other. Our society has become so polarized that rather than try to interact calmly from a position of common ground, you either stand with me and hate the other side or you become my enemy undeserving of even the slightest shred of compassion. As our society grows farther apart, reconciliation seems like a distant dream. You see it in our communities. You even see it in families as fighting and bickering and attacking never seem to end. Even as Christians, we get caught up in the fighting, bickering and complaining about what this person did or said or didn’t say or do.

...But ***“the ministry of reconciliation”*** has been entrusted to us. Our service, our assignment as representatives of Christ is to bring to our broken homes, our broken communities, our broken society the one message that re-establishes the broken relationship between sinful people and the holy God. That message? ***“...In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”*** Christ is the Prince of Peace. Christ is the Wonderful Counselor, and we represent him. We represent the God-Man, Jesus Christ, whose holy, precious blood paid the required price for the sins of every soul by his death as a true human being, yet who reconciled the world to himself as true God to reconcile us with God.

***“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: ‘Be reconciled to God.’”*** We are Christ’s representatives to the world with the only message that brings reconciliation to people of different races and nations and languages and genders and social strata and political positions. Our task is to warn people about their need to be reconciled to God and then to point them to Jesus as the only solution. That’s the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus has entrusted to us as his ambassadors representing him to the world.

Paul even gives us the message that we need to convey to our world. ***“[God] made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** Christ became your sin that you might become his righteousness! Christ was clothed with your sin to clothe you with his holiness, that you might have eternal life through him. We call that God’s Great Exchange. That Great Exchange is the clear and simple message of reconciliation that we are to proclaim as we speak on behalf of our Savior.

Dear ambassadors of Christ, our motivation to represent him clearly and faithfully is embedded in his love for us sinners. Our ministry assignment is to bring Christ’s eternal message of reconciliation with God to every blood-

bought soul that crosses our path. Only that message of Christ's love can bring true reconciliation to us, to others, and to our world. As you leave this place today, remember who you represent! We represent Christ! Amen.