

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-6:2  
AMBASSADORIAL...!

Is this your idea of what the Church looks like? Or should look like? To see the Church as a fortress inside which Christians take refuge from the world outside? We retreat behind a high wall and try very hard to be untouched by the world, uncontaminated by the world in which we live? Do we see the need to keep the faith and preserve Christian faith so that it is not diluted by the world? We perhaps see the need to preserve Christian moral values and standards and not let them be compromised by the world. So we retreat inside the fortress that is the Church and we are warm and cosy with our Christian friends and Christian sub-culture and we know the language of the Church and we keep it that way because we want nothing to change, nothing of the world to get inside; we're happy behind our big high wall; we might come out from time to time to raid the world by a mission campaign but only so that we can bring new people back behind the wall!

Or is this your idea of what Church should be like? It is the milling around of people, mixing, interacting, talking, coming and going and in middle of all of that interaction, the Church stands as a beacon to Christ. It is a much fuzzier idea of Church, not nearly so cut and dried as the fortress Church; it is more of a risk, in a sense, because the people with whom we mix will ask questions, will challenge our values and something of their world might rub off on us; but it is also possible that something of our world might rub off on them! "The fact that God was in the Nazarene neighbourhood for 30 years and no one noticed... there is a time to simply become part of the very fabric of a community and to engage in the humanity of it all." (Alan Hirsch *The Forgotten Ways* p.133) There is more to mission than that, but if that was the place where Jesus started, this is the place where we have to start as well, by being part of our community, mixing with people, letting something of Jesus rub off on the people we meet, wherever we meet them!

Paul has been writing about his ministry and the mission to which God has called him as an apostle and by his writings we have been learning a bit about our ministry and mission as the Church in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland; the same is true in today's piece from 2 Corinthians 5. There is something here about the relationship that the Church has with the world around us. There is something here about the Church's mission in the world, what it is that God has called us to be and do. There is something here about motivation and why we should take part in this mission that God has for us. Two years ago we spent a bit of time looking at mission and the whole series of sermons is still on the Church website and in the library, if you're interested!

Two words that are at the heart of this passage: "*Christ's ambassadors*". This is Scott Wightman, "Her Majesty's new ambassador to South Korea"; you might have met Scott, though you have more chance of meeting his parents in Church here on a Sunday! Scott takes up his new post in July and he will be the UK's voice in South Korea; he will represent the UK; he will be the official face of the UK in South Korea; whenever the South Korean government wants to know what the UK thinks on an issue, it will talk to Scott; when the UK wants to tell South Korea what it thinks, Scott is sent to tell them. The first thing Scott has been doing since his appointment is learning Korean; four hours per day he is learning the language so that he can communicate with Koreans in their own way, speak their language, build a bridge so that he can represent the UK as well as possible.

We are Christ's ambassadors. We may not be too keen on this idea, but like it or not, that's the reality. We represent Jesus to the people we meet. When people want to see what Jesus looks like, they will look at us. When people want to know what

Jesus has to say about life, they will listen to us. We represent Jesus in our world. In the ordinary rhythms of life, friendships, community, we represent Jesus. John Stott, in one of his books, coined the notion of “Double listening” (not related to “*Double think*” of 1984!): we listen to God through the Bible so that we learn what God thinks, and we also listen to the world, to the voices of the people around us. “We listen to the world... to sympathise with it and to seek grace to discover how gospel relates to it.” (John Stott *The Contemporary Christian* p.28) As Scott Wightman has to learn Korean so that he can speak their language, so we have to listen to our world so that we can speak its language and represent Jesus in our world to the best of our ability, to translate our gospel into a language that people who have no church knowledge can understand. In order to do that, we first have to be part of the world, part of very the fabric of the community, milling round, mixing with other people, being representatives of Jesus in the midst of that very mix.

“*We are...*” (5:20) There is a real focus for that relationship, for being representatives of Jesus. Reconciliation is about mending relationships. We all understand what broken relationships look like and feel like. Elsewhere Paul has taken a great deal of time to describe the broken relationship between God and world; it is down to our waywardness, our desire to push God out of the picture of life altogether; so the relationship with God has been broken and the Bible calls that ‘sin’. Here Paul talks about the great exchange that has taken place: “*God made...*” (5:21) In other words, all our faults, failings, mistakes, the waywardness of our human lives has been placed on Christ; He has carried it to the cross and has died for the sin of the world; because He has done that, we are new people, righteous people, forgiven people, standing accepted before God, blessed. The relationship is healed. We are friends of God, no longer His enemies and that reconciliation took place on the cross; God has done this.

We are declarers of that reconciliation. “*All this...*” (5:18,19) Reconciliation is something that God has already done in Christ. Jesus is the *agent* of reconciliation; He has done it; He has achieved it; it is now ours to declare. We are to tell people what Jesus has done for us and urge people to be reconciled with God for themselves. The one thing necessary, the ultimate issue for humanity, has been sorted once for all time by Jesus and we are to tell the world. The Church is given this ministry of reconciliation, to tell people the good news. Tell your children and grandchildren the Bible stories of Jesus; tell your friends the story of Jesus when the opportunity arises; tell people who ask you why you go to Church; tell them naturally, clearly, unashamedly. Tell people the stories of Jesus in ways that they can understand so that they may believe Jesus for themselves and so be reconciled to God. We are “*God’s fellow-workers*” (6:1) In the great mix and milling around of people, we are to represent Jesus and tell people the good news of reconciliation.

Why should we do this? Paul has two motives for his ministry:

1) “*since, then...*” (v11a) There is perhaps no Bible word more misunderstood than ‘fear’. We use it today to mean that we’re afraid of something and so we shy away from it. You have a fear of spiders, you run away! We have a fear of dentists, we just don’t go as often as we should! But ‘the fear of the Lord’ is different; in the bible this is about awe and reverence; it is about a sense of respect for God, a sense of wonder at what God has done for us. Grippled by that awesomeness of God, there is something of Him that we want to share with others; we want others to discover what we’ve discovered that God is great and has done great things; that God is worthy of respect and worship and we want others to discover that as well. Knowing how great and awesome God is, Paul tries to persuade people to believe what he believes. I think we’ve lost something of that sense of the awesomeness of God: we talk about God as our friend and that’s entirely right, but He is far more than our buddy; He is

the great God to whom the whole universe belongs, and who has done world-shattering things for us in Jesus; we should be bursting to share something of this awesome God with people who matter to us.

2) "*For Christ's ...*" (v14) An even stronger motive, if that were possible, is the sense that God loves us and because God has loved us and blessed us in Christ, we want to share His love with others. "There is no power so great, no motivation as strong, as the knowledge that someone loves me." (Barnett *2 Corinthians* p.109) This sense of being loved was now the compelling force in Paul's life; he did what he did in ministry and mission because of that sense that he was loved by Jesus and he wanted to share that love with others, he wanted others to find for themselves that sense of being loved. The gospel is not a cold economic transaction; it is enemies becoming friends; it is love being lavished; it is a broken relationship being restored. The love that Jesus has for us is extraordinary, sacrificial love, a love that led Him to lay down His life on the cross for us. So we are loved by Jesus and because we are loved and because Jesus died for us, we have a gospel to share with others that tells them of the love of God in the most powerful way.

"Are not zeal for glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the office of the holy ministry?" This is a question I was asked at my ordination and when I became minister of Juniper Green Church; it is all about motivation, what makes us do the things we do! Awesomeness of God, love that God has for us in Jesus – these are our motives for mission, our motives for representing Jesus to the people we meet in the ordinary rhythms of our lives. There are great discoveries to share about the awesome God who loves us: we need to listen again to that story; how did you react when you saw that our opening Bible verse this morning was John 3:16? Did you think 'I've heard that so many times before'? Or did you think that here is another chance to rejoice in the great love that God has for us? Be captivated afresh by the story so that we want to share it with others.

We need to listen to our family and friends; we need to listen to the people we meet in the shops, to the people we meet over the garden fence, to the people with whom we play golf, to the people we bowl with. Listen to them; what makes them tick; what bothers them; what do they enjoy; what makes them happy and sad, what hurts do they have to endure; what makes them angry; what are the barriers to their faith, to Church? Listen to them; listen to what say and the way they say it. Ask 'how does gospel relate to their world?' Learn to speak the gospel in their language.

God has reconciled world to Himself in Christ; that is done once for all time. We are Christ's ambassadors; we represent Jesus to our world. Jesus is awesome and we want others to discover that. Jesus' love is wonderful and we want others to discover that! So we tell people the stories of Jesus; we tell them about His love; we tell them that Jesus has died on the cross to set the world right. In the ordinary rhythms of life, friendships, and community we do the mission of God; we tell people that He loves them; that Jesus shares their hurts and has died for them; that there is hope in the gospel. We are Christ's ambassadors; represent Him to people you know!