



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Having to Live With It” **Sermon on 2 Corinthians**

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2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-20

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹⁶From 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. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that 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.

There are times when you have to go around the room, say your name, and tell a little bit about yourself. And I'm not sure I could claim what Paul is saying. "Well, my name is Donovan, I'm married to Beth, and we have two grown children, all of whom are employed, thanks be to God, and I'm an 'ambassador for Christ.'"

Would you dare to say it or claim it, as part of your resume? Paul says that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is reconciling all things! And so if we are in Christ, we are now “ministers of reconciliation.” Ambassadors for Christ! What do you think? Can you claim it? Pretty bold!

Yet there are people who make bold claims about their lives.

Hank Abbott, who is in my Wednesday morning Bible Study, unsolicited, announced he was a Cleveland Indians fan. To which I replied, “Hank, I have heard you speak about Vanderbilt football, and now you’ve announced you’re a Cleveland Indians fan. What on earth do you look forward to?”

And there you have it, I’ve probably offended all the Vanderbilt folks in the room...and that’s my point. We’re bold and spout off things that are disagreeable. We are open to taking a punch from time to time.

I know people who, in a room full of Republicans, will announce that they’re a Democrat. We call this event Thanksgiving dinner. But no fear! People will dare to say, in a room full a scientists, proclamations that go against the science. No facts, just say what they feel. People will dare to say things that go against the rulings of the highest courts in the land, judging themselves to be judges of impeccable standards. Bold! There are people who say things that will go against the very truths we hold to be self-evident, that “all people are created equal.” And they’ll do it while waving a flag.

So in this very daring world, would you dare to say, “I’m an ambassador for Christ.”? If you can’t say it, or claim it, why not?

Well, I can think of a few good reasons. Can’t you?

One reason is time and place. I think this is a perfect time and place to say, “I’m an ambassador for Christ.” Let’s do that right now. Turn to your neighbor and say, “I’m an ambassador for Christ.” Ok. That was awkward. If it felt awkward to claim it in church, thank about outside of church. It’s who you are, Paul says. But it’s not who we are, bringing Christ crashing into every moment. It just makes people uncomfortable.

It’s like when I went to the first round of the NCAA tournament in Raleigh years ago. I had received two tickets, and I remember showing them to my wife who had at that time, two small children, who apparently were my kids, too. But you know what I’m saying, I had to say to Beth, “I know you’ve had the children all week and here it is the weekend. And I was just given these tickets to NCAA tournament, and....” She said, “Go!”

I took my friend Carl, and we found our seats in a section filled with people from the Baptist School that was also competing in the stadium at the time. What’s the name? Oh, yes. Wake Forrest. And I’m telling you, those Baptists can swear and curse. And, when they found out we were Duke fans, they were ruthless. During a TV

timeout, one woman behind my friend Carl so kindly said, "How did you get these tickets in our section?" And Carl explained that his pastor, who happened to be sitting next to him, was given the tickets from a parishioner. And after he let that word out, it was as if Jesus himself came and sat down. It was a new creation. Those poor Baptists, having to see the world differently. It's not often Presbyterians can make a Baptist straighten up. I fully enjoyed it.

But I'm not going to do that everywhere or every time. Don't expect me to wear my stole and white raiment out on the golf course or down the aisles of Kroger. Because, then the song has to look like the bird. If you're going to look Christian, be Christian. Do you know how hard that would be? Especially in a world where it has become perfectly acceptable to speak your mind, which means if you don't have anything nice to say about a person, say it anyways. It's just easier to add all of that to the Christian wardrobe. You can be Christian and filled with hatred. Christian and racist. Christian and sexist.

There once was a man named Peter, who looked like he was a follower of Christ, and Peter had to change his song. "I deny him. I deny him. I don't know him at all." He just blended into the crowd of all who said to crucify him. Not one part of him wanted to say, "My name is Peter, and I'm an ambassador for Christ."

But to his credit, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter, with the help of the Holy Spirit, stood up. Bold! Bold! The Spirit of God caused Peter to stand up against all the meanness, the ugliness, the corruptness, the division, and proclaimed that the death and resurrection of Jesus changed everything! He showed it with his life!

Can you do that? Can we do that? I can't think of any better time for Jesus to return to this earth than right now. I happened to find a sermon on a cassette tape from an old preacher. I popped it into my 2001 Pt Cruiser because it came with a tape deck. I think it's the only tape deck left around. I listened to the sermon, and the preacher was saying how divided the world was, and this was 1989. 1989! I'd love to return to 1989. I just feel like every plow is sharpening into a sword. When the world gets hot and dry and sick and tired, watch out. There will be signs. I just can't think of a better time for Jesus to return than right now.

He can return right now. I'm wondering if the next time you have to introduce yourself to a crowd or a handful of people, can you say your name, a little about yourself, and then claim, "I'm an ambassador for Christ."?

I know some things don't need to be said. I was talking to a family not long ago, and they were telling me about their mother who had died, and one family member said, "She was a true Christian, but she didn't wear it on her sleeve." You get that, right? She didn't run around and say, "I'm a Christian! I'm a Christian! She just lived it."

I think we're more comfortable with that. In fact, that's what I enjoy as pastor - the honor I have in sharing about someone's life at a memorial service. I get to hear the

stories of a life. And every story told by a family member in love makes it absolutely clear that the dearly departed had on her resume, “she was an ‘ambassador for Christ’.” “He was an ‘ambassador for Christ’.” The brother said, “The people he helped, and no one knew. No one knew. I knew, but no one else knew.” The sister said, “If you needed something, she would just drop what she was doing and be there for you.” The daughter said, “Mom could just take my fears and make them disappear. Take fears and make them disappear.”

That’s what I need, don’t you.? Someone to take away the fear.

I like that, I need that... don’t you remember that?

When you’re upset and misunderstood, worn out from the battle, climbing into the arms of love, don’t you remember that? The arms of love saying, “What’s got you so upset?” And there in the arms of love, he said, “Well, Steve said that I wasn’t any good at playing baseball.” Did you hear the fear, “I’m not good.”? The arms of love said, “Well, why did he say that?” “I don’t know.” “Well, did he just say it out of the blue?” “No. He was the batter, and I was the pitcher, and I couldn’t throw a ball that he could hit.” Looking back at that now, it seems opposite to the game of baseball. But, at the time, what makes a friend is making contact. “I couldn’t throw a ball that he could he hit. I threw the ball. It hit him on the fingers. Then he said it.”

I remember Love saying, “Oh, honey, I bet he was tired, and you were tired and that’s why he got mad and why you’re sad.” And I just rubbed my forehead into her. And she just rocked me back and forth and reconciled the world in love. She was right. Just last week, I wished Steve happy anniversary on Facebook. We keep making contact.

Christ was an ambassador of love and mercy. And we need to take the time to crawl up into the arms of love and confess. For the arms of love say, “What’s got you so upset?” And we need to confess that we’re not able to hold it all together. That we have these fears.

My name is Donovan, and I’m afraid that the things I love are being attacked, and I hurt because of it.

And the arms of love will say, I know the feeling. I know the pain. I know what it’s like to die of six billion wounds. But I know the power of the resurrection, too. I know nothing will separate us from the love of God. And I am reconciling all things. I need your help in telling that story. I’m making you my Ambassador of Reconciliation. You.