

# The Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church

*"We Have This Ministry"*

by

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Stewardship 2 – Walk of Faith Day

II Corinthians 5: 11-20 - Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 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. 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 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; 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.

This may seem a strange text for a Stewardship sermon. In that entire passage there's no mention of tithing, no allusion to the widow's mite, the word "fiduciary" isn't used. Nothing about planned giving, a building campaign, budgets or how to give electronically.

Now there are other passages in Corinthians that would work, where Paul encourages the church at Corinth to take up the offering for Mother Church in Jerusalem, they had pledged (their version of Walk of Faith didn't include a cellist though!) financial support, now it was time to make good on their promise. Paul says, "This bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be a voluntary gift and not as an extortion." God loves a cheerful giver. Lovely text.

But that text awaits for another Pledge Day.

The theological center of almost all of Paul's theology is Reconciliation. You can't really pass the offering plate without a foundation of WHY GIVE. GOD GAVE. GOD GIVES.

God has given us this ministry of reconciliation.

Douglas Campbell at Duke Divinity had a fine article in [The Christian Century](#) last month. He counts 15 distinguishable problems that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians. And underlying this mess, was a basic failure in relating to one another in love. A great deal of what Paul says can be summed up in the phrase "appropriate relating." And in I Corinthians 12, he uses the image of the body of Christ to lay out the way the community

should relate together. No part of the Christian body is unimportant. He says, "So many problems in Corinth – and I suspect in many other places – would be solved if Christians were simply kinder to one another...Christian thinking must not be separated from Christian acting in relation to other Christians."

For the love of Christ urges us on.

From now on we regard no one from a human point of view.

"She's my sister, he's my brother."

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

(lots of angel's in this sanctuary this morning)

All of this – from God who in Christ was up to something and, for Paul, was reconciling and giving us a ministry of reconciliation.

reconciled us to God

and has given us the ministry reconciliation

Go was not and is not NOT COUNTING SINS, HOLDING OVER ANYONE'S HEADS THEIR MISTAKES

Michael Eric Dyson's book, *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* is wonderfully difficult. He teaches at Georgetown (he once taught here at UNC). His sermon is patterned after movements in worship (invocation, hymn of praise, scripture reading, benediction, etc.) The chapter entitled "OFFERING PLATE," recalls the day in September 2016 when Georgetown offered a formal apology on behalf of the university, establishing an institute to study slavery, erect a public memorial to the slaves – 272 enslaved human beings – sold to salvage the university's future. 1838. A Jesuit college that once trafficked in human flesh.

At the ceremony several direct descendants of the 272 made statement. One said, "nothing about us, without us." He argued that reconciliation couldn't possibly happen without the deliberate and intentional decision to be in partnership – partnership (KOINONIA) to heal the nation's racism.

In Christ, the walls of hostility have been broken down – in favor of a bigger table. Not all at once or an instant in our experience but now and then, here and now.

Here's how theologian Paul Tillich put it:

*We only want to show you something we have seen and to tell you something we have heard: That in the midst of the old creation there is a New Creation and that this New Creation is manifest in Jesus who is called Christ...we want only to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there, in the world and now and then in ourselves there is a New Creation.*

I love that hopeful description; here and there, now and then, an out breaking and realization of a vision – persons and persons in community as reflections of reconciling grace and embodied love.

Here and there in the world, not and then at Binkley, here and there/now and then in ourselves, and experience of the New Creation.

Says Stephen Shoemaker:

*Sometimes visible, sometimes hidden, always manifest in one Christ. If you look you can see it. In the sweet embrace of love, when hostilities are overcome and when enemies become friends again. As progress is made in civil rights. At the table of our Lord where all nations and peoples, all races, all genders, all sexual identities, well and sick become one family of God.*

*In that sublime moment when you glimpse Jesus' face and hear God's word of grace and you come home to God and self. The warfare is over. Peace.*

The ministry of reconciliation begins at home, doesn't it, in a local church community. As a friend of mine says, "all the divisions and conflicts among Christians nails Jesus back onto the cross." Ministries of reconciliation make manifest through our encounters the reality of our reconciled lives.

Many of us have been pleased to read the work of John Pavlovitz, and activist minister in Wake Forest. Late last year his book, [A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community](#) came out. He writes: "A greater faith and bigger table may well be ahead, though you may have to tap-dance through a minefield on the way. You may have to endure adversity that doesn't feel at all worth it at the time. It certainly didn't feel that way when I was getting publicly fired in the coffee shop. Like many followers of Jesus, over time I'd learned to shelve the questions when they proved too difficult or uncomfortable or existentially messy. On the outside, I had the productive, high-functioning superpastor thing down pat, yet I always carried this heavy holy unrest feeling that the Church was supposed to be something, believing that it could be something, but so rarely seeing it materialize for more than a few fleeting days at a time. I saw brief flashes of beauty, but it never felt dangerous, only occasionally yielding to something bigger. It certainly never felt like the wild, unpredictable, unstoppable movement of the Spirit of God I read about in the New Testament, where people from every disparate corner of humanity and stood in awe at the work of God in their midst. More often our local church simply felt like a successful midsize suburban company generating great faith-based entertainment every week. There were great facilities, nice people, folksy charm, and really well-produced, age-specific Sunday experiences – but the table was still smaller than it should have been, and it started to wear on me. The sustained pulling inside me was beginning to do damage. I was perpetually irritable. Community became laborious. Religion grew taxing."

*Maybe you know what that's like. Maybe the difference between the Church you dream of and the one you're experiencing is taking its toll.*

*I took a good look at my family across the table from me and decided that I needed to finish the funeral for my past and start looking for the life again.*

*For some the road away from organized religion leads them smack-dab into Jesus.*

New Creation is a vision and a prayer. Now and then, here and there, we glimpse it.

A world, a neighborhood freeing itself from addictions – all the groups who walk into this building.

A world, a neighborhood where everyone has an affordable place to live (from tiny homes to habitat houses).

A world, a neighborhood where children from all backgrounds, learn from one another.

A congregation that understands issues like “refugees” isn’t a topic for discussion alone, but needs to be met and safety provided.

A congregation that has reconciled the gulf between faith and science unafraid truth.

A church family that knows the beauty of sacred music, joy of learning the rhythm of a community at worship and service.

New Creation. Reconciliation. We have this ministry to pursue and it pursues us. We yearn to regain what was lost; our deepest longing to be at home with the Divine at home with neighbor, with creation, and inside ourselves.

Reconciliation is the burden and blessing of every congregation’s ministry, stated or unstated.

Theologians ask too much of the table in terms of theology and too little of the table in terms of community. Belonging. Family. Extravagant welcome.

My dear Pete Hill describes a “now and then, here and now” ministry of reconciliation:

*In July of 1973, I was called to be pastor of Grover Park Baptist Church in Warrensburg, Missouri. Shortly after constituting, I suggested that we needed to elect some deacons and institute a deacon ministry program – at the first meeting – which I had called – I discovered that two of the four would not speak to one another! I was told to tell so-in-so such and such! The two of them were not sitting ten feet apart! I listened to this back and forth conversation for a couple of minutes – stopped one of them in mid sentence and told them that they were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the church and I didn’t see much spiritual in what was going on – and got up and walked out of the meeting. That was in November and the deacons didn’t meet again until March.*

*I was at my wit’s end! I determined to have what I called a ‘sharing of the bread’ service. It was in February. I announced on a Sunday morning that the evening service would be a special service and I hoped every member would be present. We actually had 82 people there – two were visitors (who later became members).*

*I went home that afternoon and with my wife’s help (who, by the way, was seven months pregnant) – we baked bread – dinner rolls – from scratch – all afternoon. About mid-afternoon it started freezing rain, so of course, my first thought was – no one will come tonight! By church time, it was slick enough that I insisted my wife stay home – I couldn’t have her falling in her condition.*

*Needless to say, I was shocked when I saw the crowd! I asked them to sit every other pew so I could walk in front of each person present. I started with Ralph and told him why I loved and appreciated him; I went to his wife, Irma, and told her why I loved and appreciated her – Doc VanDam and his wife, Jonell, their daughters, and so on, through the entire congregation! Sometimes we laughed at what was said sometimes we wept – but always, I shared a piece of bread – a dinner roll!*

*Upon completion of this sharing, I simply read several passages of scripture from both the Gospel and the Epistles of John – passages dealing with our love for one another as members of the body of Christ. Upon completion of the readings, I asked those present to share their bread with one another and at the same time, share why they loved and appreciated each individual. Slowly at first, but then in a bit of frenzy, they began to pinch bits of their rolls and share with each other.*

The body, hands, feet, eyes and ears of Jesus.

*One of the deacons involved in the spat came down the side aisle toward me, and gave me a bit of his roll and told me he appreciated me and then moved past me to the center aisle of the building – and right there – at the very front and center of the church – the two deacons who would not speak to one another came face to face with each other! They stood looking at one another and then the first looked down at his hands filled with bread – he reached out and took the other’s empty hand and placed his roll in it – the other deacon responded by putting his roll in the first deacon’s hand – they embraced each other and wept – holding each other for several moments. It got very quiet momentarily – and then the buzz picked up louder than ever!*

*At a few minutes after 10 pm, I had to force folks to leave, asking them to please be careful – we were still having freezing rain. The Sanctuary was filled with breadcrumbs everywhere – and a new Spirit! When I arrived home, Susan is having a tizzy – she wanted to know what in the world happened at church – two families had stopped by the house on their way home and told her they loved her – and why – and she’d had three phone calls to express similar feelings toward her! The Force was with us!*

Now and then. Here and there. It’s often in fits and starts, but if we ever stop in believing in the power of gospel reconciliation, we ought to close the doors and stop pretending.

We – Binkley – have this ministry. It begins and ends finally with an acceptance of merciful love, gracious forgiveness – this ministry (indeed, all our ministries) awakens us to God’s love so that our lives (we are the nets, ours are the hands) proclaim it. While we are the recipients of divine love, we also become the agents (ambassadors) of God who passionately encourage others to experience it too.

The glad good news of the gospel is not ours to keep to and for ourselves; it is ours to share, to give away, open hands – hands that the Divine One wishes to use for purposes of reconciliation.

You know, maybe fiduciary was in today’s scripture text – trust with regard to the relationship between a trustee and a beneficiary. Stewards of a great love, creating bigger and bigger tables, believing taller and higher walls and fences is just plain wrong, bigger tables. We have that ministry – together. Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen.

A God whose giving to us never ceases.

Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen.