

Open to Reconcile and Make New?

Sermon on Psalm 32 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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Rev. Ellie Barrington, M.Div.

“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven”

“God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

With Psalm 32 we celebrate the exuberance we feel when we have made right a relationship that felt wrong. You know that good feeling - when you've worked through a conflict or misunderstanding, closing the distance between you and someone who matters? We're meant to get along. To love one another. Our bodies know it, so they lead us to forgiving, with anxious feelings, even heavy guilt, till we make things right again. When reconciliation comes, it is such sweet relief. There's that rush of new energy. More space inside to breath freely. A sudden physical awareness of being in God's good grace.

Think about how you felt, one time in your life when you 'reconciled and made new.' Remember a time when you gathered your courage and apologized to your partner for 'losing it?' Then, hopefully, there came that sweet embrace. Or when you've dared to raise the issue that was coming between you and a colleague and you really heard each other? It felt so good to get back to work. Or when you sat down with your child and took responsibility for your angry feelings. He recognized then that his own anger was OK, not a fault in himself, and he smiled forgiveness into your eyes, such sweet innocent absolution.

That's what Psalm 32 is about. And it contains some 'how to'. All of today's scripture readings are about forgiveness, which is a complex dance between us and 'them' and God, involving steps of open confession, mirrored sharing of feelings and acts of restitution - ending with the bows and smiles of reconciliation. God choreographs each dance of forgiveness to bring us together again - transformed to

live closer - in a whole new inner space.

Forgiveness, in its giving or receiving, is truly 'gracious living.' Its about re-loving. Forgiveness is the re-making of our God-intended compassionate connection with all of Creation. We are all broken by our 'sin' - some deficit of understanding or loving action - but Christian faith assures us that our trust connections can always be rebuilt, relationship by relationship, with the powerful attractor of loving compassion.

This psalm, and the epistle from Paul to the Corinthians, assumes that we all have 'sins' - broken relationships of various kinds, at different times in life.

Disconnection, separation, distance, deceit and destruction. Broken trusts with people and peoples, with our own souls and our Creation. The scriptures, and our United Church Creed, assume that within the embrace of God's grace, with the example of Christ, we are each called and equipped for **this** ministry: 'to reconcile and make new.'

But as the psalm depicts so dramatically, we do not get to the glad cries of forgiveness by keeping silent and hiding, in fear or in shame. And we will not get there like a mule, forced to apologize by 'bit and bridle' of parent or church or court. We will get to forgiveness by choice, because our human bodies will rebel against guilt and anger and regrets, heavy and groaning, ill and wasted, till we open our self up in honest prayer and healing action. We experience forgiveness when we face and share feelings. When we follow Spirit leadings to the place within and between, where true forgiving actually and gracefully happens.

I read from one commentator that: "From a therapeutic or psychological point of view, one can say that the psalm writer was fully aware of the need for the 'sinner' to tell his or her story as a form of self identity and self enlightenment and thus to claim responsibility [for their part] in wrongdoing." In ancient theology, there was no forgiveness without confession. In modern psychology and distributive justice,

there must be mutual listening- to both hurt and confession.

We all share the pain of a broken relationship, whoever may be - or seem - at fault. It's especially important to remember this when a marriage breaks. No one in a family is immune to suffering in this situation. No one carries exclusive blame, or sole responsibility for reconciliation. Everyone has opportunities to take steps toward forgiveness, to reconcile and transform the family configuration into something happy and good and new.

Because we are all hurt in life and often afraid, we usually can't get past our trespasses - or theirs - and arrive at reconciliation without God's council and compassion. But we are each created conscious and capable beings, so God won't lead us like a dumb animal either. Paul makes it clear that in Christ, God showed humanity how to reconcile and make all things new. As followers of Jesus we are entrusted the message of reconciliation. Trusted us to do what we have to do, to make heavenly healing relationships happen here on earth.

I grew up in the Roman tradition which required of us from the age of six, a monthly confession and act of contrition. Prayers of penance and a promise not to sin again. This uncomfortable rite with a scary priest was exchanged for a clean heart. A clean slate. But even with all my childhood piety, this formal transaction never felt true or right. What I learned from experience would make me really feel right, was telling the truth of all my actions and attitudes and feelings to God in my private prayers. Then, what made me feel happy and free was making up with my siblings or a friend, after a fight. Making up to my parents, instead of making them wrong and me right.

What makes for honest forgiving and reconciliation in your life? What transforms your attitudes and feelings and actions towards those you are alienated from? Which way is God calling you in this season, to honestly confess, to genuinely forgive, to be open up to your feelings and hear theirs, to make or take amends, to

courageously re-connect?

With the love of an always forgiving God at your back, go out in your life and do the forgiveness things you know you need to. Reconcile and re-love your human connections. Happy are those who make new! Happy be you too!

Easter is coming. Hail Jahweh! Everything - including you - will be made new.