

I. Introduction

Good morning! Happy Anniversary! Today we are celebrating 38 years of OIC ministry. Whether you are a long-term member or a new visitor, we are very happy that you are here to celebrate with us. Over the years thousands of people have worshipped here at OIC. We give thanks to the Lord for this grace, given by Him for His plan and purpose, established from the beginning of time.

In Psalm **139:16b**, King David praised God and said, **“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”** God had a plan for David's life and God has a plan for OIC as well. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and He is accomplishing His purposes in history. In **Isaiah 46:10**, God tells us, **“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”**



The Lord our God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and He is not silent. He speaks to us in many ways, and especially through His Word. Let's take a look at **2 Corinthians 5:17-20** and see what God might have to say to us this morning.

II. Scripture 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

III. Teaching

All who are in Christ are a new creation in Him. This new creation includes an inward change of the heart and it also leads to an outward change of lifestyle. Through faith in Jesus, we are made new. We are reconciled to our heavenly Father and adopted into His family as His sons and daughters. We receive this gift of salvation when we believe in Jesus, repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness, and invite Him into our life as our Lord. We grow in our relationship with Him through continued prayer, fellowship with other believers, and study of His Word.



And, as we walk with Jesus Christ, we become His ambassadors to the people of this world. We are called, individually and collectively, to the task of representing the Kingdom of God, and encouraging everyone to **(2 Corinthians 5:20b), “Be reconciled to God.”** This is God's message for all people, given through His church - given through us, for we are the church. All who have experienced the joy of salvation desire to share this joy with others. And so we invite our family, friends and neighbors, and all people saying, **“Be reconciled to God,”** through faith in Jesus Christ.



Every nation sends out ambassadors to represent its interests around the world. In His sovereign wisdom, the Lord has done something similar by sending us as His ambassadors to a lost and fallen world. Like all ambassadors, wherever we are sent, our mission is to represent the One who has sent us. As followers of Jesus, we do not have the freedom to make up our own mission or message, but



instead our role is to faithfully deliver His message and to carry out the mission He has given us.

Let's take a second look at **2 Corinthians 5:18**, "**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.**" This verse reveals that our mission is a God-given ministry; the, "**ministry of reconciliation.**" Other Bible verses tell us more about our mission, for example, it is a world-wide mission because God loves all people. It is also a mission that focuses on evangelism and discipleship. We are to proclaim the Name of Jesus and help people to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. But here, Paul expresses the Great Commission in terms of the ministry of reconciliation, an idea that teaches us a lot about the heart of God.

This ministry of reconciliation begins with the invitation to be reconciled to God, but it does not end there. It is also the ministry of reconciliation for families, friends, and nations. Be reconciled to God, and be reconciled to one another. In the love of Christ we begin to learn how to live in peace and harmony. We learn the way of reconciliation from the Bible, and from the Holy Spirit of God living in our hearts. Wherever there are damaged or broken relationships, whether between family members, friends, coworkers, or even between races or nations, there is a need for reconciliation.



But many people do not seem to know how to be reconciled to one another, so we need examples to show us the way. The Scriptures meet this need. For example in Genesis 33 there is the story of Jacob and Esau, twin brothers whose relationship had been broken for many years. Jacob was returning to his homeland, but his brother Esau was coming to meet him with an army of four hundred men. Jacob was greatly afraid, but God had promised reconciliation, so Jacob sent servants ahead with a generous gift to soften Esau's heart. In **Genesis 33:11**, we read of the meeting of the two brothers, Jacob says, "**Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.**" **And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.**" Esau's acceptance of the gift shows that the brothers were reconciled on that day.



Another example of reconciliation can be found in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers had been very jealous of him, and they had sold him into slavery in Egypt. But God caused Joseph to prosper, and eventually Joseph became a ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Years later, there was a famine in Israel, and Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. There in Egypt, Joseph had power over his brothers and he could have taken revenge for their cruelty to him. He could have had them imprisoned or even killed. But Joseph didn't do that. Instead, Joseph chose to forgive his brothers and they were reconciled. **Genesis 45:15**, "**And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.**"



One of the best known examples of reconciliation is in the parable of the prodigal son. The young son asked his father to give him his inheritance early, and then he went to a faraway land and squandered it. The day came when the son realized how foolish he had been and he returned home and told his father (**Luke 15:21**), "**Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.**" The son was ready to take the role of a lowly servant. But the father called for a celebration and dressed his son in rich robes and rejoiced, because the son who had been lost was found. And a ring was placed on the son's finger, signifying that his place as a son had been restored.



These stories provide examples of confession, apology, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. These stories are models of how to achieve reconciliation wherever human relationships are broken, but there is also an even deeper meaning. Each of these stories also speaks of the need which every man and woman has for reconciliation with the Creator God, our heavenly Father.

God created the heavens and the earth and He created us. God created us to have a loving relationship with Him and with one another. But our sins have separated us from God and from one another as well. As **Isaiah 53:6** says, "**We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.**" If the

prophecy of Isaiah had stopped there, we might have become very discouraged. But the prophet Isaiah continues and says, **“and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Here, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. By taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself, Jesus provided for the forgiveness of sin and made a way for us to be reconciled to God.



This prophecy of a coming Messiah was fulfilled seven hundred years later when Jesus came into this world and walked the long and lonely road to the cross, where He gave His life as a ransom for our sins. Because of the cross, we are able to receive forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God. This salvation is the gift of God to us, freely given to all who confess their sins and turn to God through faith in Jesus. The stories of Jacob and Joseph, and the parable of the Prodigal Son give us good examples and models for seeking reconciliation. But in the death of Jesus on the cross, true reconciliation is accomplished because Jesus’ death is accepted by God as payment in full for the sins of the world.

John 19:30 records the moment when the work of reconciliation was completed, **“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** When we trust in Jesus our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God. And so we are also called to join the mission of proclaiming the message of reconciliation to a lost and fallen world. **2 Corinthians 5:20**, **“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”** We are sent out as ambassadors to a lost and fallen world, representing Christ and spreading His message of reconciliation.



By the way, if you were looking for an ambassador, where would you look? I think you would probably look at an embassy. For example, if I wanted to find the Canadian ambassador, I would probably visit the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo. As Ambassadors’ of Christ, we often have to go out and find people to share the Good News with them wherever they may be. But sometimes people have heard a little about Jesus and they come looking for us.



This is why it is important for the church to have a visible presence in the community. The true church is not a building; the true church is the assembly of the believers. But church buildings and established times of worship also play an important role in providing a visible presence of the church so that people who are seeking the truth about the Kingdom of God know where they can find Christ’s Ambassadors.

OIC does not have its own building, but advertised meeting places and published service times have still given OIC a visible presence in Osaka for 38 years. For 38 years, OIC has served as a place where the people of Osaka could come and meet with Christ’s Ambassadors and learn about the Kingdom of God. Now we have a very nice place to meet with lots of space and a good atmosphere. Meeting in the Osaka Christian Center gives us good visibility in the community and makes it easy to invite people to join us. Just as an embassy provides a visible outreach from the nation it represents, the building gives God’s church a visible and welcoming presence in Osaka.



But, I wonder, do our friends, coworkers, neighbors, and family members know that the church is here? As Christ’s ambassadors, we want to be diligent to share the Good News of Jesus with people wherever they are, but we also want to make sure that they know where to go if they become interested in Jesus at a later time. Every ambassador makes sure to advertise the location of their embassy and their consulates. We also should make sure that people know where the church is and that they are always welcome to come. Maybe they won’t come the first or second time that you invite them. But they will come when they are ready to look for answers about the meaning and purpose of life.

In Micah 6:8, our purpose of is written with these words, **“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”** The purpose of man is to walk with God. And we do that through a loving relationship with Jesus Christ.



This year, we are working on a special challenge here at OIC. I first shared this challenge with you on May 6th. Do you remember what the challenge is? Here it is, *“Let’s Fill the Hall for the glory of God!”* And, even more specifically, as a prayer: *“My specific prayer is for us to grow in love and outreach so that at 10:00 am on Easter Sunday, March 31st, 2013, this hall will be full of people giving thanks and praising God for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.”*

After I shared this challenge last May, I felt a bit disappointed to see our attendance actually go down over the summer. Recently, I have felt encouraged as the attendance has been rising again over the past month. But we want to walk by faith, not be feelings. Whether we feel disappointed or encouraged, our mission to share the Good News of reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus remains the same. As Christ’s Ambassadors we urge the people of the world to, **“Be reconciled to God.”**

Our goal to fill the hall can be an important part of the ministry of reconciliation because coming to church is one of the best ways to learn about Jesus and to be reconciled to God through faith in Him. The process often begins when someone prays for someone they love.

By the way, I have my prayer card here. Do you have yours? If you don’t have one, there are available on the rack in the hallway, please help yourself. Once again, I really want to encourage you to fill this out with names of people that you want to be with you here at OIC on Easter Sunday of 2013 and pray for them. Some of those people will be family members or friends who have not yet learned about Jesus. Others may be people who used to be part of our OIC fellowship, but who have been absent for a long time and need to be invited and welcomed back.



Pray for the people on your card to be here at Easter, but don’t wait until a week before Easter to invite them. Start now by inviting them to a regular worship service. Or invite them to the Alpha Course that is starting next Saturday, or to one of the small group Bible studies, or even just to lunch to begin building or restoring a relationship. Christmas will be coming soon and that is also an excellent time to make a special effort to invite others. Be a bold ambassador for the Kingdom of God and you will find many ways to share with and encourage people so that they can be reconciled to God and to family, friends, and neighbors.

IV. Conclusion

The invitation to come to Jesus and be reconciled to God is for each and every person. And, the greatest expression of love that we can give people we care about is to introduce them to Jesus. In Matthew 22, an expert in the Law of Moses tried to test Jesus. Look at his question and Jesus’ answer. **Matthew 22:36-39, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

When we serve as Christ’ ambassadors, inviting people into relationship with Him, we fulfill both of these commandments. Our faithfulness to the mission and ministry God has given us expresses our love for God, and our efforts to share the love of Christ with others expresses our love for our neighbor. May the Lord daily give us wisdom, grace, strength, and boldness for this ministry of reconciliation. Let’s pray.

V. Let’s pray.