

## **and reconciling the world to yourself**

Matthew 28:16-20

April 16, 2017

Irreconcilable differences. That is grounds for divorce in Iowa, the only grounds for divorce in Iowa. Irreconcilable differences. A relationship grown so divided, so distant, so broken, that it cannot be saved, that the partners cannot be reconciled. Irreconcilable differences. It is now the catch-all term for any number of factors contributing to the degradation of the relationship.

It might mean infidelity, one or both partners violating trust by taking their affections elsewhere.

It might mean neglect, abandoning your spouse financially, emotionally, or physically.

It might mean that there is no more common ground, no shared sense of values or purpose or direction, that both partners have very different ideas about where to go and what to do.

Or it might mean simply that there is no more love, that your investment in your partner, your care for her, your interest in his well-being, your stake in a shared future, is gone, gone cold, dead. And maybe that is the cruelest cut of all, that one who loved me loves me no more, that the person in whom I find delight no more finds delight in me, but instead finds me tiresome or burdensome or just irrelevant, unimportant, of no matter.

Irreconcilable differences. That's how it was between God and the world, between God and us. Irreconcilable differences. A relationship grown so distant, so out of sync, so untended, so broken, that it cannot be saved, that we cannot be reconciled. For any number of reasons ...

Because of infidelity, because we have given our hearts to other things, because we have entrusted our safety and security and well-being to other powers.

Or because of neglect, because we have simply cut God out of our daily routines, out of sight, out of mind, out of heart.

Or because we have gone another way, because our values and goals and dreams have taken another direction, because God and we have very different ideas about where to go and what to do.

Or simply because there is no love. We don't love God any more or never did. And that is the cruelest cut of all. What is it that God wants from us, more than anything else?

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength!*

God wants to be loved by us! Because God is lacking without our love? Do you want to be loved because you are lacking? OK, don't answer that!

But God is God. God takes delight in us and wants to be loved by us because God knows that is how we find delight. Life is not about spinning our wheels or building legacies or amassing fortunes. Life is about relationships, loving and being loved, we with God, God with us, and all of us with each other.

And for God, who finds delight in us, who has created and moved worlds for us, who has been merciful and loving and patient with us, generation after generation, century after century, age after age, for God to be spurned and ignored and despised by us? You and I, we cannot imagine the agony, the pain, the heartbreak.

Irreconcilable differences. That's how it was between God and the world, between God and us. That's how it was!

*In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death, and reconciling the world to yourself.*

In Jesus Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself: coming to us, crossing the distance between us, coming to where we are, to share our space, to share our lives, to share our common lot. Jesus doesn't come to us as a policeman or judge or enforcer, but as a suitor! In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, God comes to us, inviting us, entreating us, professing love to us.

God is who God is. God neither can nor will be other. In Jesus, God comes to us not condoning or excusing sin, not minimizing the hurt or damage done by our infidelities and carelessness, but coming as God always comes, being who God always is, a God of grace and mercy and constant love. In Jesus, God comes to us, healing and forgiving, welcoming and inviting, revealing God's heart, proving God's faithfulness.

And we? We despised him. We rejected him. We regarded him as if he were nothing. And we killed him.

Let's be clear about this! They didn't kill him. We killed him. You and me. Every one of us. We killed Jesus. Because it was sin that killed him, the sin that is our infidelity, our neglect, our rejection, our pride, our lack of love. You can only say that you didn't kill Jesus, if you can say you have no sin.

Jesus' arrest was our petition for divorce, and when he was hung from a cross, the divorce was made final. It's done! We're done! And now we are free, free to go on our merry way ... to hell!

Except that it's not done. God is not finished. We killed Jesus, but God raised him from death. For us! For our sake! God is not finished. God is not finished with us. God will not not love us.

We did everything humanly possible, everything worldly possible, to deny God's overtures, to reject God's love, to cut God entirely out of our lives and out of life itself. And God took it. God took it all. God accepted the terms of divorce and swallowed the bitter poison of our hatred to the last drop ... and lives, lives not to exact revenge, but to reconcile.

In Jesus Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself. Reconciling -- it is an ongoing process. God is still reconciling, still coming to us and sharing our common lot, still conquering sin and death, because that is what Jesus does and Jesus lives!

God is reconciling the world, reconciling each and every one to himself and reconciling each and every one to each other. Our sins have been forgiven. The walls that divide us have been torn down. There is nothing, nothing past, nothing present, nothing future, nothing in all creation that can ever separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God is reconciling the world. We will not be left alone, any of us. We will not be left estranged, any of us. God will not rest, God will not be finished, until this new creation is finished, until the work of reconciliation is done.

It is God's work and now ours, too, an ongoing process.

*Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples.*

Invite them in. Bring them home. Bring them home to me. All of them. All peoples everywhere -- Burmese and Nicaraguan, Liberian and Korean, Haitian and Moldovan.

Easter is not about us, it is about the world. And it is not about then or even about one day, but about now, about the power of resurrection now at work in us, reconciling the world to God and us to the world.