

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Communal reconciliation

Don Richardson tells the story of how two warring tribes in Papua New Guinea made peace after a battle. The chief of the losing tribe gives his son to the chief of the winning tribe. That chief doesn't harm the son. As long as that boy is alive there is peace between the tribes. He is called the peace child. Jesus was offered as our peace child to maintain peace between us and God. Communities that are at conflict with each other today need the true peace child for them to have lasting peace between them.

Ephesians 2:11-22

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) — ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

1) God is for community

- Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
 - When we think of families we often think of nuclear families i.e. a husband and wife and their families.
 - In Hebrew culture when families were spoken about the whole community was referred to.
 - The Hebrews came from one family – Abraham, his son Isaac, his son Jacob, and his twelve sons.
 - In community oriented, as opposed to individualistic oriented, cultures cousins are often referred to as brothers or sisters. Other community members feel that raising someone else's children is their responsibility and don't hesitate to discipline someone else's child.
 - These are strange concepts for those coming from individualistic oriented cultures, but are normal in community-oriented cultures
- What I'm getting at is that God created and is for community.
- However, it isn't only the nation of Israel that God intended to be a community, but every nation and culture
 - ...from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
- And God decided where the nations would be located
 - Acts 17:26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.
- If God is for community, then what went wrong? Why is there so much strife between communities?

2) The great rift between communities

- When we look at the world we see constant intercommunal strife
 - Ethnic, racial, linguistic, tribal, international, religious
 - Apartheid was a major problem in South Africa, and still needs a lot of work to deal with it
 - The Ukraine – Russian war
 - Hindu – Muslim conflict in India
 - Israeli – Palestinian conflict
- Where does all this intercommunal conflict come from?
 - Sin and selfishness

- Pride led the people of the plain of Shinar to build a tower that reached the heavens so that they could make a name for themselves.
 - Genesis 11:5-8 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."
 - ⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.
- With this confusion and scattering came conflict
- The consequences of communal conflict are dire
 - Strife leading to a lack of peace
 - Tension
 - Physical, material, and emotional destruction
 - Displacement
 - Oppression

3) Communal reconciliation through the cross

- There are always many attempts at mediation and reconciliation between conflicting communities
 - Egypt plays a mediatory role in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict
 - Russian is acting as a mediator between Syria and Turkey.
- Many ongoing conflicts have continued although there have been years of mediatory efforts to bring peace.
 - The reason for this is that they work at bringing superficial peace and don't deal with the root problem of the conflict, which is sin
- The Jews and Gentiles were hostile towards each other
 - Ephesians 2:14-16 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.
 - Peace between communities is found in Jesus who put to death sin in us and broke down the walls of hostility that separated us.
- The ministry of reconciliation between communities has to have the message of the cross at its center for it to be fruitful
- Does this mean that we shouldn't work towards communal reconciliation unless we preach the gospel to them?
 - No, it doesn't
 - As much as the church was responsible for apartheid, other parts of the body of Christ were on the forefront to dismantle it
 - There's a Christian ministry based in Jerusalem called Musahala, which means "reconciliation" in Arabic, which works towards breaking down walls between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Christians and Muslims
- I believe the church is called to be an instrument of communal reconciliation
 - Start with the believers of the conflicting communities
 - We need to make ourselves available in conflict areas
 - Often conflicts between other communities affect the believers in the area, so resolving conflict benefits the church as well as the community at large.

4) The Spirit of unity

- The church ought to set the example of living in unity in diversity
 - Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.
 - John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."