

The word Lent means spring. Indeed, in this Lenten season as the snow melts and it starts to look a bit more like spring, we consider the renewal that is taking place all around us. Plants start to bloom, birds start chirping, and we consider spring cleaning as the yard dries up and reveals a winter's worth of twigs and other debris.

Perhaps the renewal of spring was on Paul's mind as he wrote his second letter to the Church in Corinth. This passage in our Epistle lesson today teaches us what Christianity is all about: **GOD SENDS AMBASSADORS TO RENEW, RECONCILE, AND REVERSE SINFUL HUMANITY.**

The Bible uses three images of what it means to be a Christian: new creation, a restoration of relationship, and an unfair trade. In other words, it talks about salvation as renewal, reconciliation, and reversal. Let's talk about each in order.

I. God sends ambassadors to renew corrupted creation. Our text for this is verse seventeen: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** To be in Christ means to be made brand new.

Perhaps you remember your first car. Everyone's mileage may vary, but I can't imagine it was a brand-new Cadillac or Lexus. For many of us, the car was a bucket of bolts.

My first car was a green 2005 Chevy Malibu Maxx. Perhaps some of you remember it, too. When I first got to this congregation, I still had it after all those years. I remember all the idiosyncrasies: the stain in the seat from the soda I spilled, the hole in the back door upholstery from when my friend would absentmindedly pick at it when I gave him rides, and the loose shifter that you could pull up from the shifting shaft.

Since I got here, I've been spoiled to have new leased cars, a Toyota Camry I inherited from the previous pastor, and a couple of Subaru Legacies. They drive smoother, have cleaner interiors, and safety features of modern cars. The comparison is night and day.

Apart from Christ, we are like that old first car: banged up, bruised, and broken. We are sinful in need of a savior. We cannot continue on in our old ways. Humanity is corrupted by sin, and so we see a world of violence, selfish actions, and hatred.

But God sent an ambassador to renew corrupted creation. That ambassador is Jesus Christ who came to this earth to turn old junkers into sports cars. His miracles were a window into a different world without sin, pain, and suffering. His suffering, death, and resurrection were the cash payment on the newest model.

In Christ you are made new. If I were to look in the backseat of the new Subaru, there wouldn't be a hole in the upholstery from when my friend picked

away at it. There wouldn't be stains from that large Pepsi I spilled in the front passenger seat. I could pull up on the shifter and it wouldn't escape its housing. I'm not driving the Malibu I drove in High School.

To be a Christian means to look at the past regrets of your life, and to see they are no longer yours. Those mistakes you made with that lousy high school boyfriend, the time you flew off the handle at your wife and kids, the nights where you went too far with alcohol, gambling, or drugs—whatever it may be. They are no longer there. To look for them would be like me trying to look for a hole in the upholstery of my new Subaru in the same spot my old Malibu had a hole. That is forgiveness.

**“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”** And we get the chance to be an ambassador or renewal, sharing this wonderful message of renewal with others, that in Jesus Christ, their past is truly past.

The second image Paul gives us is reconciliation. II. God sends ambassadors to reconcile a broken relationship. At a certain LCMS congregation, the pastor would have the veterans stand up on the Sunday nearest veterans day so the congregation could thank them. This pastor saw that an old veteran didn't stand up even though he fought in World War II.

The pastor came up to “Klaus”—mind you, “Klaus” wasn't his real name—and asked why he wasn't standing up. Klaus said that he shouldn't stand up because, yes, he was in World War II, but he was on the wrong side. He was a foot soldier in the German army. The rest of the standing veterans heard the conversation and urged Klaus to stand up and gave him a rousing round of applause. They applauded not because Klaus fought for Hitler, but because God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ Jesus, Christians are reconciled to one another, even those who may have shot at each other in a theater of war.

**“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”**

If you find this story incredible, God does even better. The Bible tells us that while we were enemies of God, He sent His Son Jesus to die for us. Perhaps you may hear of a story of a soldier falling on a grenade to save the lives of his brothers in arms.

Imagine a Russian soldier in a foxhole with his comrades. He pulls the pin out of a grenade and drops it by accident in the foxhole. In what world would a Ukrainian soldier fall on that grenade to save Russian soldiers? If that were to happen, would not the entire squad gladly lay down arms and surrender themselves to the selfless act of the enemy soldier?

**“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** The Father sent an ambassador to restore His relationship with His fallen, rebellious creation. Jesus Christ died for you that you may be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Let’s continue on with this illustration of a Ukrainian soldier sacrificing himself on a Russian grenade to save Russian soldiers. Would not word of this heroic act spread beyond the squad in that particular foxhole to the entire platoon, company, and even division? Would that not also inspire many more Russians to surrender or even defect?

To be reconciled to God in Christ Jesus means to no longer have the creator of the universe to sit in judgment over you, but to be your Loving Father. No longer does He count your sins and failures against you, but His Son Jesus deigns to call you friend.

Klaus the German Veteran didn’t deserve recognition of veterans day, but in the Church we recognize something greater than America, Germany, Russia, or Ukraine is here. The U.S. veterans recognized a greater reality, that Klaus was made their brother by the blood of Jesus Christ. **“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”** We have been entrusted this message of hope to share with others.

Finally, III. God sends ambassadors to reverse our sinful condition. The word reconciliation in Greek has in its root the Greek word for exchange, literally, to make otherwise. In salvation a Great Exchange takes place. Earlier I called it an unfair trade. We read this in verse 21: **“For our sake [the Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

When you close on a house, you get everything on the property and everything in the house. So we got all sorts of fun stuff: an old sprinkler, leftover vinyl siding that we used to re-side the west side of our garage, spare flooring that I used to re-floor the entryway. You also get some not so fun stuff: three trees that we hired professionals to chop down, a hollow core front door that we had to replace on day one, and cracks between the baseboard and flooring when we took out the old carpeting to refinish the oak hardwood floors underneath.

Imagine you lived at a \$50,000 house in La Crosse that was literally falling apart at the seams. On day, someone knocks on your door. He is a rich doctor at Gundersen who lives in one of those Cass Street mansions. He offers you a deal. Trade your entire property for his entire property. He would pay the property taxes and would give you an allowance for maintenance. The only catch was that you could only take out a mini-van’s worth of stuff from your house.

Remember in this scenario, you live in a \$50,000 hovel that's falling apart. You could take a mini-van's worth of stuff so you could take personal items like clothing and documents. Would you do it?

There is a great exchange that goes on in Christianity—an unfair trade, a wonderful reversal. **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Christ takes on our sinfulness and flaws, and He gives us His perfection, righteousness, and holiness. The result being that on the day of judgment, when the Father looks at you, He sees Christ's perfection and holiness rather than the sin and muck that you live in. This great exchange means that your sins are no longer yours.

My family went to dinner at some members' house and they were talking to us about some of their adventures in home ownership. They said that after they closed on their house the previous owners left a few boxes of personal affects in the house. Rather than contacting the parishioners, the previous owners just stopped by the house when they weren't there and picked up the items and left. In the big picture of crimes, that probably doesn't deserve a headline in the evening news, but the homeowners still felt angry and violated that this happened.

As we consider the renewal, reconciliation, and reversal that Christ works in your life, we need to highlight that your sins are no longer yours. To fish around for sins that happened years or decades ago would be like wandering around your old house after you already closed on it. It's not yours and the contents are no longer yours. In Christ, God has closed on your old house of sins, regrets, and failures, and He puts up a sign that says, no trespassing.

Rest easy dear child of God. In Christ you are a new creation. Your past is past, no longer are you defined by regrets and sorrow, but by hope and joy. You have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. You are part of God's loving family. Your sins are taken away and you have been given Jesus' righteousness. What a privilege it is to be ambassadors for this message of hope with those we know and love. Amen!