

Who are you?

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God the father and from the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Can I be real with you?

I have many faults. I'm a sinner just like each and every one of you. As I was studying this lesson from 2 Corinthians 5 for the sermon, one of my faults jumped off the page and showed me the ugliness of my sins. Last Saturday, we had the first of four canvassing opportunities for Week in the Word. Let me tell you about some of the people I met.

One guy was outside, so instead of going to the door, I walked over to where he was sitting. Do you know what the first words out of his mouth were? I shouldn't use some of them in a sermon—or anytime really—but here is the gist of what he said: "This better not be any of that religious garbage!" I was taken aback. Who greets someone like that? But I pulled it together. What was my response? "Yes, it is, sir! I'm actually a pastor at St. Paul Lutheran, just a block away. A few of us are out today to invite—" and he cut me off before I could finish! He interjected, "I don't want anything to do with that garbagy garbage!" At this point I was more than taken aback. I was angry. He was calling my profession garbage? He was saying that inviting others to hear the Good News about Jesus was garbagy garbage? It was hard to properly respond to this, but in the most loving way that I could, I said, "If you think what I am doing here today is garbage, and if you reject what Jesus did to wash away all the sins that stain your life, you are on a one way path to hell."

Then I left.

The next guy I want to tell you about was very open and honest. He had been hurt by a heterodox church who only wanted his money. He had been hurt by his addiction to cocaine. He had been hurt by a debilitating illness that was so bad he had been pronounced dead. Needless to say, he had a rough life.

The final guy, was under house arrest. He had a few DUIs, his license was revoked, and he had some other offenses on his record. He came out, yelled at the dogs, finished his beer, and asked me why I was there. I found out he has lived here in Tomah his whole life, he has never stepped foot in a church, and he knows nothing of his Savior.

I had many other encounters that day, but those three stick out. While it was good to go out there to seek the lost, I had fallen into a terrible trespass against God and against my fellowman. Do you know what my sin was? I looked at these three people according to the flesh. Whether it was what they were wearing or how they were talking or what they were drinking at 10 in the morning, I looked at them according to the flesh, that is, according to their sins, social status, wealth or lack thereof, or something else just as worldly.

What I needed was to be reminded of what was found in this lesson from 2 Corinthians 5. You see, I was going about my work without seeing redeemed souls who need to hear the Savior's call to **"be reconciled to God."** Instead, I looked at these people and decided in an instant who they were. That was my problem. I can't look at people for who they *were*, I need to look at them for who they *are*. That question must be answered! Who are they? Not their names, but their status. Better yet, since I'm not talking to them today, but to you—and hopefully, prayerfully, you'll get out there and be an ambassador for Christ too and talk to others like them—the question we really need to *be* asked and *to* ask is this: Who are you?

Listen again to who God says you are in our lesson for today:

¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again. ¹⁶As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way. ¹⁷So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come! ¹⁸And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. This is God's Word.

We are going to answer the question "Who are you?" soon enough. But before we can fully appreciate who we *are*, we must first understand who we *were*. And this "we" is not just for those in this room (or those who are reading this sermon), but this "we" is really for all people. All of us were the opposite of what is described in our lesson today. We were all not compelled by the love of Christ. We were all living for ourselves. We were all looking at people in a fleshy, worldly sense. We were all shackled to our sinful nature. We were all chained to the old man. We all had our trespasses (or sins) counting against us. We weren't ambassadors but enemies of Christ. And, we were all not in a right and harmonious relationship with God, but we were all broken and shattered because of our sin.

That is who we *were*. We were sinners. Sinner who deserved nothing but God's wrath and punishment. And apart from Christ, that is all anyone was going to get. Let that sink in for a moment. We need this part to sting to the point of hopeless despair. As sinners, we deserved to be cast out from the presence of God forever—to be completely cut off from him, treated as rebellious, selfish, thankless, heartless, ruthless offenders who should be thrown in the abyss, thrown into hell, for all eternity. That is what we deserved because that is who we *were*. But this lesson doesn't focus on who we *were*; it focuses on who we *are*!

Who are you?

You are a sinner turned saint all because of Christ's love. And now, that love compels you. The word "compel" is very interesting. It has the sense of urgency, to have pressure around you on all sides, to be squeezed. How are we squeezed? By the overwhelming message of the Gospel—the Good News about Jesus. We are squeezed by that message to lead us to a beautiful conclusion. The word "conclusion" is also interesting. It has the thought of making a judgment based on taking all the various factors into account, or based on evidence in the court of law. So, we are being told Christ's love is so compelling because we are convinced by what we have seen through the lens of faith that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Why is this such an important point? It changes who we are! How does it change who we are?

"God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." This is God's message to us. He used Jesus to take on the consequences of our sins. In exchange, he gave us Jesus' righteousness. God changed who we were through Jesus. We are no longer dead in sin, but alive in Christ! So, when the Word, the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, is heard, it is an overwhelming squeeze that convinces us to see as fact that every sin of every person in the whole wide world was placed on Jesus.

This includes every sin I have ever committed in my life and will commit in the future. This includes every sin you have committed or will commit. This includes the sin that any person has committed or will commit. In Romans 5 we hear that Adam was the source of sin for the whole world that condemned the world to death. It also says that Jesus was the source of justification or declaration of innocence for the whole world. **“So then, just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people” (v. 18).**

As it says in our lesson, **“For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died.”** Notice it says that because Jesus died for all, all died. By paying the ransom price for my sin, Jesus caused the death of my sin. I have no power in myself to kill even one small sin I have committed. I may kill the germs on my hands by washing them with soap and water or by putting some germicide on my hands, but even that is only 99% effective. I am 0% effective in killing my own sin. I cannot remove or destroy or kill any sin. Instead, my sin will ultimately destroy me on judgment day. The same is true for you and every single person you see.

Unless...Unless we believe that we are included in the **“all”** for whom Jesus died on the cross.

Don't worry! You are included! All means all!

And this belief isn't even something that we do; it is the Holy Spirit working in us when the Word is heard. As that Word goes in through our ears and touches our hearts, the Holy Spirit plants a seed of faith that grows into the hope that we have. There is hope for this poor sinner in the words, **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”** There is peace for this poor sinner in the words, **“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).** And there is comfort for this poor sinner in the words, **“The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).**

Those words are also for you. You have hope, peace, and comfort too! Why? Because of who you are!

Who are you?

You are a redeemed child of God. You have been bought with the priceless, precious blood of Christ. You have been made his own through the waters of baptism. You are forgiven. You are innocent. You are a saint because of the holiness Jesus has given you. Forget all the times that you have looked at people with a fleshy, worldly point of view. Forget all the times you have sinned against God or your fellowman by being selfish and only thinking of yourself. That was the old you! The new you is here!

You are a new creation because you have been reconciled to God. The way this word is always used in the Bible has God as the subject—the one doing the reconciling—and people as the object—the ones being reconciled. We can't repair the broken relationship between us and God that sin caused—only God can. That is why the Good News about Jesus is so vitally important. It is the only path to heaven. It is the only way we are saved. It is the one way that our enmity, or hostility, toward God is rightfully put back where it should be: between us and Satan. It is the one place we see our broken relationship with God repaired. This reconciliation is what makes us a new creation.

This new you knows who you *are* but doesn't forget who you once *were*.

That love that changed you—the Love of Christ—is what motivates you, compels you to live as the new creation that God has made you. Your status as a new creation is now your identity. Who you are is whom God has made you. Along with the redemption, forgiveness, and salvation that he has given us to make us who we are, there is one more title we have: **we are ambassadors for Christ!**

What does an ambassador do? An ambassador is an authorized representative or messenger who speaks on the behalf of one party to another. As Christ's ambassadors, we are representing the one who died and rose to win for us salvation, and that is the message we are to share. On Christ's behalf, we are witnesses who use the Word. We go out and tell others about the Good News of Jesus.

We don't forget who we *were* apart from Christ. We remember it constantly to make sure we never take Jesus' love for granted. But as we go with this life-saving message, we don't look at people as they *were*; we regard them as they *are* according what Jesus has done for them on the cross—just like he did for us. The only difference is that many of the people we see still don't know their Savior, so they don't really know who they are. As you do this wonderful work of being his witnesses, don't fall into the trespass or sin of regarding people according to the flesh. Instead, regard them for who they *are* in Christ.

Can I be real with you?

Those people I talked to last Saturday needed someone to look at them as they *are* according to whom Christ has made them. They need more than just a few of us to do this work. They need each and every one of you to do it. And this work isn't something that can be pushed off to be done at a later date: Christ's love compels, urges, and squeezes us to be his ambassadors. You don't know if today will be your last opportunity to tell someone about the love of Christ. You don't know if your witness will be that someone's only chance to hear the Gospel. You don't know if the world will come to an end tomorrow. So, I urge you to go about your work as Christ's ambassadors with a zealous compulsion and to regard everyone you see as a redeemed soul who needs to hear the Savior's call to **"be reconciled to God!"**

That is your mission.

You know who you are.

It's time for you to tell someone who doesn't yet know who they are. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ, Jesus. Amen.