

*Let us pray: Lord, show us your glory, that we may tell of your salvation.*

Long, long, long ago, thousands and thousands of years ago, people told stories to explain how this beautiful, amazing world came into being, and how things got so screwed up. The story we have in our bible is in Genesis. That story tells of how God put the man he'd created, and the woman he made as a partner for that man, into a lush garden, watered by four rivers, with all the food and shade and beauty they could ever want. They could have it all.

And there was only one tree whose fruit they were to leave alone.

So, one day the woman was hanging out by just that tree, and a serpent sidled up and distorted things, 'Did God say not to eat from any tree in the garden?'

No, said the woman, all the trees are okay, except the one in the middle.

If we eat from that one, or even touch it, we'll die."

(God hadn't said anything about touching it...).

The serpent said, "Oh, you won't die! God just doesn't want you to be as wise as him, knowing good and evil." So the woman looked, and the fruit looked good, and pretty, and surely God want them to eat well, and to be wise, right?

So she ate some, and gave some to her husband, who didn't say boo.

And right away something changed. They were aware of themselves.

Before they just were. Now they both were, and were aware of being—

Now they were split, no longer fully integrated. The first break.

And they felt shame, something they had never even heard of.

They were aware of being naked and they didn't like it – they covered themselves, and when God came looking for them for their daily walk in the cool of the evening, they hid. And when he called, they didn't answer.

They loved God! God provided them everything and loved them, but here is the second break, between humanity and God.

Then God called the man, who said, "Yeah, I heard you, but I was naked, so I hid."

And God said, "Who told you you were naked.

Hey... did you eat from that fruit of the ONE tree I told you not to?"

And he says, "The woman you gave me, she gave it to me!"

So we have the third break, between human beings, men and women.

And when God turned to the woman, she accused the serpent, “He tricked me!”

Break number four, between humanity and the created world.

And that break got bigger when God made clothes to cover the man and woman –

animals had to be killed for skins. This was a vegetarian paradise up till then.

But now death entered the picture. Sin and death were here to stay.

These primal breaks, breaches – between us and God, us and each other,

us and the creation, and within our very selves –

these are the breaches Jesus came to heal. To restore us to wholeness.

That is what Paul writes in Corinthians – that God reconciled us to himself

through Christ, not counting our sins against us.

This was not a cheap or easy action – it was enormously costly for God, the

sacrifice that Jesus made for us in becoming one of us, in dying on the cross.

But God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son,

that we should not perish but have eternal life.

The mission of God is to reclaim, restore and renew all of creation to wholeness

in Christ, and that begins with reconciliation wherever there is estrangement.

Reconciliation has different components–

Repentance – becoming aware of how we have sinned and been less than

who God made us to be;

Asking forgiveness of God, of each other;

Accepting forgiveness – which includes forgiving ourselves.

Extending forgiveness to other people, and really releasing them, no matter what

they’ve done. Forgiveness is costly! If it were easy, everyone would be doing it...

All of these go into the work of reconciliation.

And beyond that, we have a ministry. Reconciled people become reconcilers.

They say “hurt people hurt people.” Well, healed people heal people.

Reconciled people become agents of reconciliation.

That is a ministry to which each one of us is called as a follower of Christ –

To be an ambassador for Christ. With all the divisions in our country now,

We have many opportunities to be agents of reconciliation.

Our Methodist sisters and brothers are in the middle of a big ol’ opportunity

to practice reconciliation, and it’s hard!

This church has been through its times of deep conflict, as has the Episcopal

church at large. It’s almost harder when you’re trying to forgive fellow

Christians, because they ought to know better, right?

But reconciliation is our work, and we can get better at it the more we practice. The benefits go beyond healed people, families, communities, and creation –

Reconciliation reveals God to the world. It presents a true picture of God's power and love, in the face of a world that presents a picture of conflict and power-grabbing and "I'm right and you're wrong."

Reconciliation is how we make Christ known, and that is the job of ambassadors.

When people are at peace, especially in this day and time, people notice. They want to know the source, "how can you disagree with that person so vehemently and still be loving to them? How can you be at peace in these? circumstances? How can I get me some of that?"

This Lent I invite you to not only to give things up, but to take on up the ministry of reconciliation.

That means knowing our own stuff and offering it up for healing and forgiveness.

That means getting good at forgiving others, seventy times seven – infinity.

That means forgiving ourselves, and even forgiving God.

It means healing the damage our estrangement from this earth has wrought.

It means spreading peace and good news.

At the end of reconciliation there is always rejoicing.

Jesus told that beautiful parable about a son who treated his father as though he were already dead, took his inheritance and squandered it, and came back, with no hope of being a son anymore, just a servant if he was lucky – only to be greeted by his father in the road with sandals and a cloak and a ring – restoring his sonship. At the end of that story there is a great feast and rejoicing, because "this son of mine was lost, and is found."

And even though not everyone was reconciled – the older brother is still out in the field, seething in hatred and resentment – the feast goes on, because rejoicing is too important to wait till everybody gets on board.

We just have to do it and make it so much fun, in the end they'll all come to the party.

That's' what we do here. We offer our repentance, we receive God's "I love you!"

And we come to the feast, reclaimed, restored and renewed.

And then we go apart, to find others and bring them to the feast too.

Now is the day of salvation! I wish you a holy and joyful Lent.

*Amen.*

## **Matthew 18:15-22**

[Jesus said] 'If another member of the church sins against you,  
go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.  
If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.  
But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you,  
so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;  
and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church,  
let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.  
Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,  
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.  
Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,  
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.  
For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

## **2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2**

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:  
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!  
All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,  
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;  
that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their  
trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.  
So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;  
we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.  
For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,  
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.  
For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have  
helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!