

Ambassadors of Peace

Introduction: Shalom is God's vision of how His whole creation ought to be and Jesus is the Prince of Peace who paves the way and empowers humanity to begin a shalom-making journey. He becomes our example and guides us to flourish in our relationships with God and people in this world and the new heaven and new earth.

cf. Philip Yancy said (*Leadership*, Vol. 8, no. 3), "For the watching world, we ourselves serve proof that God is alive. We form the visible shape of what he is like."

When we reach out to others, we represent Christ as His ambassadors! This is a daring adventure!!

I would like to share with you this morning **four characteristics of ambassadors of peace:**

1. Hearts are transformed and soaked in God's love.

"¹⁴For ***Christ's love compels us*** ... ¹⁵he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for ***him*** who died for them and was raised again ..." (2 Cor. 5:14-15 NIV)

Paul's experience of life-transformation here underlines the essence and extent of God's love. Listen to the testimony of Paul:

"¹²I'm so grateful to Christ Jesus for making me adequate to do this work. **He went out on a limb**, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. ¹³The only credentials I brought to it were **invective and witch hunts and arrogance**. But I was treated **mercifully** because I didn't know what I was doing--didn't know Who I was doing it against! ¹⁴**Grace mixed with faith and love poured over me and into me. And all because of Jesus ...** ¹⁵ Jesus Christ came into the world to save **sinners**. I'm proof--**Public Sinner Number One**--¹⁶of someone who could never have made it apart from **sheer mercy**. And now he shows me off--evidence of his **endless patience**--to those who are right on the edge of trusting him forever." (1 Tim. 1.12-17 *The Message*)

Our willingness to love others is **in direct proportion to our personal experience of God's love.**

The distance which God has gone for us should be the measure of our love for everyone else around us.¹

It is ***not enough*** to experience God's love and forgiveness; ***neither is it sufficient*** to avoid personal sin and bad habits. ***We must do something – something***

¹ "The revolution of Jesus is in the first place and continuously a revolution of the human heart or spirit ... which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ***ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice***, as well as their ***bodily tendencies and social relations***." (Dallas Willard)

pro-active and positive – to demonstrate God’s love and to participate in God’s world-restoring mission!

It is paramount and imperative for us to remember this everyday! “We love because God first loved us.”

2. Arms are wide open to embrace the world.

“¹⁴For ***Christ's love compels us***, because we are convinced that one died for ***all***, and therefore ***all*** died. ¹⁵And he died for ***all***, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for ***him*** who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So from now on we regard ***no one*** from ***a worldly point of view***. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is ***a new creation***; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:14-17 NIV)

The center out of which our lives operate is the good news that Jesus died for ***all, everyone! No one is excluded and everyone is in the same boat.*** God included ***everyone*** in Jesus’ death so that ***everyone*** in the world could also be ***included in a far better life than people ever lived on their own.*** And because of this good news about what God has done for ***all, we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look.*** Because of what God has made available to ***all*** in the death of Jesus, we now look at ***the inside*** – the heart and soul of every individual - and see that anyone

can get a fresh start, can be created new from the inside.

The length of our arms should be long enough to cuddle the world in our bosoms, long enough to reach beyond personal, cultural, socio-economical hurdles, to extend our hands of friendship and to develop growing relationships!

The hardest individuals for us to accept might well be the most hurting, lonely, and needy in the crowd!

Cf. Mother Teresa once said, **“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”**

The **“threshold” of our tolerance and patience** is always determined by the **closeness of our relationship** with the individuals involved.

Open arms – being welcoming, allowing others to get closer – means being vulnerable, risk-taking, putting down barriers

3. Hands are always ready to serve the weak and needy.

We cannot be **in-active or re-active**, if we truly embrace the world! For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son to us – He has compassion for anyone in need; He sees the problem and He becomes part of the solution.

“¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us ***the ministry of reconciliation***: ¹⁹that ***God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them***. And he has committed to us ***the message of reconciliation ...***” (2 Cor. 5:18-19 NIV)

Just as **God puts the wrongs of humanity square on Himself** when Jesus was nailed on the cross and gives the world a **fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins**, we are given the task of **helping everyone to experience God's mercy and unconditional love in and through whatever ways we can to serve** – even if it means **getting our hands dirty, sacrificing our time and resource, giving up a few self-indulgences, or getting out of our comfort zones**. [*Here to say something about yearend giving.*]

The sacrifice God made for us must become our **motive and driving force** of our service. The most precious gift we can give to others might be our **helping hands and time**, the most sought after commodity in the world.

The pressure of our post-modern culture pushes us to separate private beliefs/faith from the public persona/market place.

We do devotions, but we don't live devotionally.

Faith, belief in God, spirituality, is all confined to a compartment, instead of flowing through our blood streams.

But that is never God's intention; integrity – consistency between our private life and our public acts – is authentic faith [thus opposing hypocrisy].

Cf. My experience in China Town, Vancouver, re: teenage prostitutes.

4. Feet are quick to go wherever God sends.

Paul is crystal clear about our responsibility and mission:

“²⁰We are therefore **Christ's ambassadors**, as though God were making his appeal ***through us ...***” (2 Cor. 5:20 NIV)

Being Christ's ambassadors means **being sent out as His representatives, on His behalf and behest** – commissioned – **to represent Him in whatever places He wants us to be, to do whatever He wants us to do, to communicate whatever message He wants to deliver with exact accuracy.**

God has a message for people who are wondering what life is all about and we must present it clearly and in a manner most appropriate to ourselves.

Our **“good works”** must be accompanied by our **“good word.”**

The modus operandi is **“GO and TELL”** the good news of what God has made available to humanity in **obedience and faithfulness – restoration** of a broken relationship and **re-establishment** of a friendship that has **social and eternal impact!**

While we only need **a few seconds and a simple push of a button** to connect with another person on **the opposite side of the world** via the internet, we might find it **extremely challenging and difficult** to connect with our neighbors **next door or across the street.**

The closest to us is always furthest away - the shortest distance might require our longest time to get there!

Conclusion: Cf. I read about a story of some Catholic nuns in Cleveland, Ohio, who were given a free vacation to the Rocky Mountains. They were awed by the glory of the mountains. They would stop, ponder and behold the majesty of the scenery. However, every time the group stopped, Sister Margaret, one of the smallest members of their Order, would move to the edge of the group, disappear for a while, and then return sometime later. They didn't know what she was doing.

So one time when the group stopped at one location they decided to follow her. They watched her as she

bent down and reached under a sizable rock, and then turned the rock upside down. She brushed her hands and turned around to walk back up the trail.

When she looked up, the entire Order of nuns was watching her. "Margaret, what are you doing?" they asked. "I'm turning over a rock." she replied. "Why?" they asked. "Do you do that every time?" She answered, "Yes." "Why do you do that?"

And she replied: "Because I will never pass this way again, and **it's my intent to have made a difference while I was here. So I turn some rocks over so that this place is different because I passed here.**" (Cf. Rev. Douglass M. Bailey, Sermon: Hard Truth For Advent)

What rocks does Cornerstone/do you personally have to turn over in our neighbourhood for the good of this community and for the world?

What rocks do each one of us need to turn over inside of our hearts in order for God to make a difference in our lives?

