

## 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

### **Living Openly and Expansively!**

Here comes trouble! That is the thought, or one like it, that may go through your mind when you see or hear from someone with whom your relationship is not quite on the good terms that you might wish it to be. It might be the thought someone has when they see you coming! 😊

Each of us has a relationship or two, maybe more, that we just cannot seem to reconcile. With some of those relationships we conveniently forget about how we as Christians are called to act toward others. We come to church, listen to the sermon, enjoy the singing of hymns that talk about God's expansive love and then walk out the doors and within minutes find ourselves saying and doing things that we know are not all that Christ-like. We have all done it.

Call it human nature, but it is so easy to criticize, have unrealistic expectations of how others should be in the world and then either ignore or forget about what we are doing in our own lives that is creating challenges for others. Often, we feel and experience the way someone or a group of people has injured us, but we likely have done the same to others.

I still remember junior high...so glad I am not in junior high anymore...those were some of the roughest years of figuring out relationships. I remember a group of girls that I wanted to be with asked that I tell another girl, who had been my friend for some time, that she could no longer hang out with us. I can still feel the injustice of it all and saddest of all is that I did what was requested. I called my friend, who literally lived two houses from me and told her what the group had decided. I don't have to tell you what she was feeling... anger, hurt, broken-hearted, unworthy.

On top of that, not many weeks later the group cut ties with me. Talk about a life lesson. I wish I could say it was the last time I had to learn a life lesson about relationships, trust, compassion, and expectations, but it seems to be an ongoing learning. Over the years I have hurt people and people have hurt me. Just when I think I may have people figured out I get another surprise learning. Having said that, I have also learned and experienced what it looks like and feels like to have good and healthy relationships. Letting go of those relationships that cannot be salvaged for one reason or another, letting go with good-will and grace. This can happen even if the other person is unaware of that good-will toward them, as they are feeling angry with me and so reconciliation in the way I may hope cannot come to fruition.

I have also learned that many relationships can be reconciled when I learn to be curious about the other's reasons for how they think and behave. When I learn more about who

they are and also for taking responsibility for my part in a break in a relationship and saying, "I'm sorry for..." adding whatever it is that I am sorry for.

I share all of this to help make sense of what is up with this reading from 2 Corinthians. This letter is about heartbreak and relationships. The relationship that was broken was that between the Apostle Paul and this church in Corinth. This was a church that Paul had established and then left to go on to the next work that God was leading Paul to do. But Paul did not let go of them. He wrote to them and they wrote back. At some point he came to realize that others have come and are tearing apart the work that Paul had done in Corinth to teach the truth about Jesus and God's work in the world through Christ. The truth being that God in Christ was reconciling Godself to the world, to the people that God had created, and that was then the basis for how we are to be with one another in the world, whether that be with family, friends, in community with those we know or in community with those we don't know and yet are called to care for.

There is always a caveat. Do not reconcile at the expense of your safety if you have come out of or are in an abusive relationship. Part of growing in wisdom is realizing that in some cases the only things you can do are to walk away from that relationship and then pray for wellbeing for the other and yourself. That God will take care of what you cannot.

God has given us a marvelous life and as Paul wrote, please don't squander one bit of it. We squander our lives when we make our wants come before another's needs. We squander our lives when we hold on to grudges or past mistakes, those we have made and those mistake or grievances others have about us. God is saying, I am here to help. God demonstrated God's deep love and desire to be reconciled to people when God's son, Jesus came to live among us, then through the work of the cross took away all barriers in this life to be in relationship with God, and through that, in a new way be in relationship with others as well as reconciling ourselves to ourselves.

This is about living life in the kingdom of God, this kingdom that is already on earth, not just in a heaven that is out there somewhere. This is about living a wide-open, spacious life. Living in this way comes from the freedom that we experience when grace, forgiveness, hope, compassion, and love are part of every equation, every interaction, every conversation...every relationship whether momentary or life long. And the example of this kind of living is what God did in and through Jesus. God loves us so much that he gave his one and only Son that we might have life and have it in abundance.

This life is not about how much stuff we can acquire or how much money, power, and prestige we have. This life is about living in a way that is open and expansive when it comes to our relationship with God, with others, with creation, and with ourselves. It is a kind of living that is open to loving and being loved, to forgiving and being forgiven, to experience heart break but willing to go on living because that is what we are designed for. We are designed for a wide-open, spacious kind of life. We were never meant to live

small, to feel small, to have reservations about who we are and who others are. We are not to feel fenced in because our lives are small and we are certainly not to feel fenced because of our faith.

Living as followers of Christ means expansive living. Living in a way that expects that no matter what we face we can live well through it and at the very least come to see daily the grace and gifts of God that is evident all around us.

This is no Polly Anna living, where we go about with rose coloured glasses, denying the pain and indignity that is around us. This is especially important in the month of June which has lenses on both our relationships with Indigenous People and is Pride month where we acknowledge and celebrate the expansive love of God in creating a spectrum of people who go beyond the fenced in and small focus of seeing people as only male and female. This is about living into the love and grace that is freely given to us when we believe that God is at work in us, in others, and in the world. The brokenness of the world will always be with us. Yet we are called to live like we actually trust and believe that God is at work in the world despite what it looks like.

We live as people who actually believe God is at works in the world and are called to show up and live our faith as a witness to others.

Paul went through a whole litany of struggles he and those he traveled with had faced. He wrote,

People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

Most of us, who call this church their home, actually most of us in churches across Canada, never have to deal with the hardships that Paul and his companions faced, still we have our own life and times. We are acutely aware of our need for forgiveness, the ways we have hurt others and the ways we have been hurt. We cannot help but see the brokenness in the world in the way people desire power over others whether nation to nation or person to person. As Christians we are called to live lives that are not confined or fenced in but open and expansive. Lives that see need and respond to it. See brokenness and restore relationships, people, and creation to wholeness. And then we rejoice in community for what has been accomplished, even if those moments are brief and incomplete.

Today may you look at your life and see where you can live openly and expansively. Where you can restore relationships in your life and in a larger sense of community and not miss or squander on bit of this marvelous life God has given each of us. Be courageous, wise, loving, and grace filled as you walk in the world knowing that God goes with you in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.