

“Being A Restorer of Relationships”

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

We have gathered the Sixth Sunday of Easter to remember and experience this truth: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Jesus rose from the dead, accomplishing forgiveness, rebirth, and God’s saving power for humanity. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead demonstrates God’s unconditional love for every human being past, present and future. Jesus loves you my friends and loves others through you. About the love Jesus has for you and how Jesus loves others through you, Latasha Morrison tells the following story:

.... [In 2015], I was working for a church in Austin. We were in the weeks leading up to Easter, and just like the rest of the staff at the church, I was snowed under. I was in charge of a special community project—something different, something exceptional, something Easter big—and it had been my idea. With the help of a team of coworkers and volunteers, I was pulling together a fifty-thousand-egg Easter egg hunt for the kids of the church and the surrounding community.... In the midst of all these preparations, my dad called.... he was considering making the drive from North Carolina so we could spend Easter together. I loved the idea, ...but explained how busy I’d be Easter morning. He told me not to worry about it, said we could catch up after the services, after the Easter Egg hunt... [Easter services and the Egg Hunt ended] I hopped in my car, fired a text to my dad telling him I was on my way home, and pulled away from the church, exhausted, sore, fulfilled and ready to unwind. When I walked through the front door, my dad was already kicked back on the couch, feet up on the coffee table. I sat beside him and asked about his trip, how the drive went, and why in the world he’d driven through the night all the way from North Carolina.... In the middle of my spiel, I heard a loud thump from the other room.... seconds later, there it was again. A third time, louder, and I jumped up from the couch and ran to my bedroom, where the sound had come from.... There was another bang at the closet.... the door swung open and out jumped my mom. She was the last person I thought might be in the closet.... My parents have been divorced for over twenty-five years.... In a confused daze, I watched as my dad walked into the room and stood next to my mom.... When they first divorced, I would have told you they’d never mend fences.... But it wasn’t the way they’d

treated each other that made this surprise reunion unlikely. They both lived so far away, and neither of them liked flying. What's more, even after our relationship was mended, my mom vowed she wouldn't come see me in Texas because it was too hot. Despite all my work in the field of racial reconciliation, my dad knew something I hadn't yet learned. He learned that restorative reconciliation is always possible. He knew that split sheets can be mended and relationships can be put back to rights. All it takes is a little time, a little understanding, and a worthy cause. And there I was, experiencing the fruit of it.¹

Relationships that are broken can be restored. The key phrase is “restorative reconciliation.” Latasha's parents did not get remarried. However, their relationship was restored to a place where they were friends and could drive together in order for Latasha's mom to continue restoring her relationship with Latasha.

Restorative reconciliation is the message of Jesus. To restore relationship with God and others is the journey of life. Restorative reconciliation is at the core of Jesus' statement that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Moreover, the Greatest Commandment, The Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 encourage us to be continually about restorative reconciliation with God and others. In this regard, Latasha Morrison, author of *Be The Bridge*, our resource book for this series writes,

The next morning, my mother and I sat in the living room talking, just the two of us. I asked her.... why she agreed to sit in a car for sixteen hours with the man she once seemed to despise? “It's better than flying,” she said, and then she smiled. “Besides, people grow up, Tasha. They evolve. And I wanted to see you more than I wanted to hang on to some old grudge.” That's when it hit me: their motivation for restorative reconciliation, for making peace and working together, was their love for me.²

Knowing you're loved by Jesus and that Jesus lives in you motivating you to let Jesus

¹Adapted from Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 172-176.

²Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 177.

love others through your words and actions, moves us to grow up and let go of old grudges. Restorative reconciliation is motivated by love.

Psalm 98, 1 John 5:1-6 and John 15:9-17 focus on God restoring relationships through the working of the Holy Spirit. God's reconciling work is an outcome of God's steadfast love and faithfulness to the six days of creation.

Psalm 98 enthrones the marvelous things God has done bringing people to restored relationship with their Creator. Psalm 98:1 reads "O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory."

1 John 5:1-6 affirms that believing in Jesus Christ, living in the love of God and sharing that love with others testify to God's ongoing work of restorative reconciliation. 1 John 5:1-2 reads, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments...."

John 15:9-17 continues the theme of abiding in Jesus. By keeping the Ten Commandments, we abide in God. The first four commandments are about relationship with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of life): we are to have no other gods before the God of the Bible, make no images of created things to bow down before, take not the name of God in vain and remember the Sabbath day. The final six are about relationship with others: honoring father and mother, not committing murder, adultery or theft, not bearing false witness against a neighbor and not coveting your neighbor, spouse, family members or stuff. Abiding in Jesus is a distinct characteristic of enduring fellowship with God and mystical union with God. Jesus says

in John 15:10, “If you keep my commandments.... you will abide in my love.” Jesus commanded his followers then and commands us now to love God (the first four commandments) and to love others (the final six commandments).³

The message of the Sixth Sunday of Easter is this: Jesus’ love for you and your ability to love others motivates behavior of restorative reconciliation. Latasha Morrison, writes, “As Mom and Dad pulled away, I considered the lesson. Bridge builders grow; they mature. And if they’re growing in the right direction, if they’re committed to the work, they’ll eventually learn the way to restoration of healthy relationships. It won’t be easy, but it’s the work of the gospel.”⁴ Love God and love others. Immerse yourself in the Sermon on the Mount. And love the least of these. The purpose of your salvation beckons you to behave with love toward others, even when they behave badly toward you.

By believing in Jesus Christ, we participate with God in the mission of restorative reconciliation. We love, because God first loved us. The foundational mark of the church is how it loves. Be humble. Be an empathetic historian. Be a reconciler and healer. Be for the oppressed. Be a righter of wrongs. Be a restorer of relationships. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 9 May 2021
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³In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Rhodora E. Beaton, Steven J. Kraftchick, Lindsey S. Jodrey, Deidre Good and Rodger Y. Nishioka in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 270-271, 272-273, 274-275, 276-277 and 278-279.

⁴Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge*, 177.