

2 Cor. 5:16-21; Isaiah 11:1-10 -- **Our 6-Syllable Work**

Feb. 10, 2013 – Faith MC

Wise pastors don't fill their sermons with 6-syllable words.
But there's one 6-syllable English word we cannot avoid,
because it's our job description—it's why we're here—it's our Work.

Re-con-cil-i-a-tion; 6 syllables.

A complicated word and a difficult task, but a very simple meaning:

bringing together what has been separated.

Or even simpler—in a 2-syllable word: healing.

In 2 Cor. 5, the Apostle Paul says that every Christian is called to
“the ministry of reconciliation.”

To use Jesus' simpler words: “Blessed are the peacemakers.”
“Blessed are those who make it their mission to bring together
that which has been broken apart;
blessed are those who see conflict and brokenness and help
people find healing;
blessed are those who enter into polarized situations and help
people find common ground;
blessed are those who dare to believe that enemies can become
friends, and who take action to try to make that happen.”

Further back in time, the Old Testament prophets spoke of “*shalom*,”
a word which means that all relationships are in harmony and at peace:
relationships with God, with one another, and with creation.

Further back, Genesis 3 tells the story of how sin entered the world.
Because of sin, people became separated from God.
Because of sin, people became separated from one another.
Because of sin, people became separated from the goodness
of God's creation.

Accepting your job description as “ministers of reconciliation” means
simply this:

You accept the task of helping people who are separated from
God to experience and accept God's unconditional love.

You accept the task of helping people who are separated from
one another to move a step closer to each other.

You accept the task of helping people who have lost touch with
God's creation to re-establish their connection to the earth,

Whether your reconciliation efforts are on the world stage or in the
tiniest, most modest detail of daily life, it's your **Work**—with a capital “W.”

When you accepted baptism, you accepted the job description that

goes with it: **Minister of Reconciliation.**

You're a minister of reconciliation you join a Christian Peacemaker Team in a foreign land, taking the risk of standing directly between people who are fighting.

You're also doing it if when you try to stop your children from hitting each other.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you practice sustainable agriculture, when you recycle, when you stop using Styrofoam, and when you buy free-trade coffee.

You're also doing it when you approach someone in love instead of avoiding them in fear.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you tell your neighbor about the peace you've found by being totally honest with God.

You're also doing it when you pray for a family member, or for a neighbor, or for the President, or for peace in the Middle East.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you try to help conflicted family members hear and understand each other.

You're also doing it when you go into Voluntary Service.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you listen carefully and patiently to someone with whom you disagree.

You're also doing it when you build efficient buildings, carpool, or repair something instead of throwing it away.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you forgive, when you admit you might be wrong, when you refuse to take yourself too seriously.

You're also doing it when you choose a profession that seeks to heal rather than a profession that seeks to destroy.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you walk or bike instead of driving.

You're also doing it when you tell your neighbor about your good friend Jesus.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you choose to see the good in someone instead of focusing on their brokenness.

You're also doing it when your spouse says something that makes you really angry, and in response you say, "Let's take a 10-minute time-out, and then let's talk."

You're a minister of reconciliation when you see evil, name that evil, and then strategize on how you're going to overcome that evil with good.

You're also doing it when you nurture God's earth instead of depleting it.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you help a child discover a gift, or when you help them believe they are loveable, and precious.

You're also doing it when you learn a new language, or a new culture.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you accept a leadership position in the church or community because you have a vision for bringing diverse people and viewpoints together.

You're also doing it when you work at the homeless shelter, help with the MCC sale, or fix a neighbor's faucet.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you write or email lawmakers, urging them to do justice and show compassion.

You're also doing it when you support a friend who's trying to overcome an addiction.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you decide that it's more important to be right in the relationship than to be right on the issue.

You're also doing it when you support VORP, which stands for Victim-Offender **Reconciliation** Program.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you help someone who's been turned off by rigid religion realize that doubt is a part of faith.

You're also doing it when you feed the birds when the earth is covered with snow.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you take in a foster child, or when you invite that new family to your home for dinner.

You're also doing it when you participate joyfully in worship, even if the music that morning doesn't fit your personal tastes.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you read stories of peace heroes to your children each night before they go to bed.

You're also doing it when you refuse to laugh at a racist joke.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you take the time to get to know your neighbor, or your co-worker.

You're also doing it when you invest money in ethical, socially responsible funds and businesses.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you create beauty, when you use your gift of art or music to help people see and feel in new ways.

You're also doing it when you refuse to buy items that were made in 3rd-world sweatshops.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you put extra insulation in your attic.

You're also doing it when your delight with life and your sense of humor lightens the burdens of others, and helps them live in grace.

You're a minister of reconciliation when you give a hurting person a hug.

You're also doing it when you shock an enemy with a surprising act of kindness instead of pulling out a weapon.

Some of your efforts will fail. Bad outcomes are possible.
It may take years to make the tiniest step of progress. It's easy to despair.

And it's easy to protest, "Nice words, pastor, but you're unrealistic:
The Israelis and Palestinians have been fighting for millennia.
You don't know my mother-in-law; she'll never change.
My friend has shut the door on God completely.
Buying energy-efficient light bulbs won't save the earth.

And you know what's REALLY unrealistic? It's that vision in Isaiah 11
of wolves and lambs living together in the corner of the barnyard,
leopards and goats enjoying each other's company,
lions and baby calves chatting about the weather,
bears and cows sharing the same delicious tuft of green grass,
predatory animals declaring themselves vegetarians,
little children playing with snakes in total safety—
it's a sweet, ridiculous fantasy."

True—Isaiah's barnyard is NOT the way our world operates.

But it's the way God WANTS it to operate.

It's a picture of God's plan from the beginning, when God created all things
good, all things and all people in harmony with each other, with God,
and with God's creation.

God paints that picture of a peaceable barnyard,
hangs it on the wall right in front of us and says,

"My children, my ministers, make the world like this Isaiah barnyard.

Be a peacemaker.

Love your enemy.

Really mean it when you pray, "Your kingdom come on earth."

Be a minister of reconciliation."

No matter how impossible the situation looks, always know this:

If you're trying to bring together what sin has separated,
God is on your side.

To have God on your side—well, that's no small thing.

More precisely, and more importantly,
when you are trying to bring together what sin has separated,
you're on God's side.

Let that fact give you courage—courage to become agents of healing,
bearers of hope, carriers of love, conduits of divine power,
ministers of **reconciliation**: your 6-syllable Work.