

A Lenten message from Bishop Stephen Lane / part 4 of 5

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:6-11)

The command to love our enemies is the most difficult part about reconciliation for me. It is difficult enough for us to get along with our friends with whom we often experience a falling out. It is so difficult to see the world from another's perspective. How much more difficult to see the world from the perspective of someone with whom we are at odds, whose lifestyle and beliefs challenge our own!

The point Paul was trying to make, I think, is that no one is God's enemy, at least in the sense we usually mean. Or to say it another way, all of us are enemies of the Gospel. None of us loves God and our neighbors in the way God intends. We are imperfect, and that very imperfection, that very human weakness, is what joins us with our neighbors. We are not reconciled by our own actions, which always fall short, but by God's action in God's love for us. Our forgiving others is a mere reflection of what God has done in loving us.

Those who know me know that I speak with the confidence of one who thinks he is right. I mean, I do try to be right. But I hope, I believe, there is a small place in me where I acknowledge I might be wrong, that I don't hold the whole truth, that others may, in fact, have a piece of the truth that eludes me. The call to reconciliation is a call to humility, to a recognition that it's not just you who needs to be reconciled to me, but that WE need to be reconciled with one another. My need for reconciliation is as great as anyone else's.

The call to reconciliation, to join together as one human community across our differences, to love someone I am at odds with, is the heart of our faith in the God who is love. And Paul says the test of this love is our willingness to die for one another.

I don't think I know if I would die for a friend. That's a moment of decision, I hope I don't have to face. I guess I hope I would be able to put the life of someone I loved before my own. I wrestle with my ability to love someone I don't like. I wrestle with the idea that God intends love to be this deep, to the death. I invite you to wrestle with this love. What does it mean for your relationships?

Let us pray

*In this season of self-examination, may God give us grace to see our own need to be reconciled and help us move closer to those who share our common need, even those who hate us. **Amen.***