

thus making peace, and might **reconcile** both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” (Ephesians 2:14-21, NRSV)

“For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now **reconciled** in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him...” (Colossians 1:19-22, NRSV)

Living into a spirit of reconciliation: Responding in a new way...

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of **reconciliation**; that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of **reconciliation** to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:16-21, NRSV)

reconciliation

Reconciliation—the process of re-establishing fractured relationships. The word evokes peace, contentment, soft voices and clasped hands. The word comes from the Latin meaning to unite (*conciliare*) again (*re-*). Whatever has been severed comes together; whatever is too long or too short is adjusted; whatever is out of sync or out of rhythm is harmonized. All becomes right with the world.

The picture looks lovely. But “all is right with the world” is not a reality that most of us live out fully every day. Most of us manage to give or receive violence, cruelty, mistreatment, insult or neglect from a person, a group or an institution without working through the “wrongness” to the “rightness.” As individuals, communities and especially nations, we become separate, bridgeless and deaf islands of mistrustful and suspicious people.

So is reconciliation possible? Yes it is, but it doesn’t start in the midst of peaceful unity and quiet togetherness. Reconciliation is born out of the presence of brokenness, which puts one on a journey to discover what true harmony and unity are all about and what they cost to maintain. Sometimes whatever was broken does need repair. Other times, it needs to remain broken, be discarded and be replaced with a more authentic and meaningful unity. Pain and suffering resulting from “unforgivable acts” become barriers to reconciliation. Before forgiveness of the wrongdoer can occur, the hard labor of planting, growing and nurturing all aspects of reconciliation must be embraced. That labor includes: 1) acknowledgment that something has broken; 2) willingness to speak and hear the truth; and 3) intention to make reparations and amends for the wrong done.

One reason for avoiding such an intense process may be self-doubts. Where can one find the courage and energy to do this type of work? Ultimately, such spiritual strength and wisdom come from God in Christ Jesus. But every living, breathing body is also



Scripture for the Journey

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important. All of us are vessels capable of receiving that which God wants to pour into us, which is the Spirit of Christ, to incarnate the reconciliation process in our own day. We are not only passive works in progress waiting upon “M’Lud Christ” to heal all wounds and mend all relationships. Ours are the bodies and souls that God needs to heal—and ours are the hands, feet, hearts and guts that God uses to do the healing. We are the Body of Christ doing the repairs and making the reparations.

Word search

Looking up the English word **reconciliation** in John Kohlenberger’s *The Concise Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version*, one would think that it wasn’t too important a concept, especially in the Hebrew Scripture, where the entries are few. Checking a biblical Hebrew concordance on line at <http://bible.crosswalk.com>, however, yields the Hebrew word *kapbar* (כַּפַּר), which does not only mean to make reconciliation. It also means “to cover,” “to pacify,” or “to propitiate.” It is used most in Leviticus and Numbers and is translated as “to atone for sin”—to make satisfaction, reparation or expiation for wrong or injury done to another or to God. Expiation almost always includes the sacred sacrifice of animals—including their meat, but especially their blood— as well as the return of property or payment of a fine. Restoration of the personal and communal life after the break of relationship requires something that activates “re-membering” back to God. Reconciliation requires a sacrifice of life, blood and substance.

The word reconciliation shows up in the Gospel tradition only once, in the Book of Matthew (5:23-24). Matthew wants to remind us that reconciliation is a part of the giftedness and high cost of a relationship with God, but also the openness and honesty required among human beings to practice it.

In Paul’s Epistles, the word reconciliation is used more often and with a greater diversity of nuance. Various forms of Greek words are all translated into English as “reconciliation”, but their particular meanings help the concept take flight. For example, *apokatallasso*—to reconcile completely; *diatallasso*—to change or to renew friendship; *katallasso*—to reconcile those at variance; *hilaskomai*—to be gracious and merciful. And while the destination remains always Jesus Christ, we realize that the entire universe is the goal that God has set before us.

Holy Scripture is only one of many provisions that God offers for a journey such as this. The Holy Spirit breathes prayer and revelation into our bodies every day. God, our Creator, has gifted our humanity with the abilities to reason, to make choices and to co-create the realm of God on earth with God. Openness to the spirit of Christ’s discerning love can help one to choose the right equipment for the appropriate time.

Make today the day you seize the moment to discover where God wants to go with you and with your neighbor. May the God who reveals the glory of creation, the Incarnation of Jesus Lord and Savior, and the life of the Spirit bless this and all of your journeys.

Why reconciliation? Something whole has been broken or severed...

“For he [Jacob] thought, ‘I may **appease** him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.’” (Jacob fleeing from Esau toward the river Jabbok; Genesis 32:20, NSRV)

“On the next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make **atonement** for your sin.’” (The day after the Israelites worshipped the golden calf; Exodus 32:30, NRSV)

How to reconcile? Willingness to speak the truth...

“The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is **blotted out**.’” (Isaiah’s call; Isaiah 6:7, NRSV)

How to reconcile? Willingness to hear the truth...

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be **reconciled** to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24, NRSV)

The source and sustainer of the reconciliation process? Jesus Christ...

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. 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 5:1-11, NRSV)

Living into a spirit of reconciliation: Starting from a new place...

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two,