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**2 Corinthians 5:11-21 – October 5, 2008**  
**Faith Christian Fellowship, Layne Kilbreath**

**Theological trouble in the Bible: The Corinthians forgot their job description – God’s ambassadors to the world**

**Clark T. Randt Jr.** is American Ambassador to China. As Ambassador, he’s the highest ranking US official in China. He’s been **sent** to **represent** the US. Around the Olympics, we’re probably safe to assume Randt didn’t rant or rave much, but drew on diplomatic skills when dealing with those who wanted boycott the Olympics because of China’s alleged human rights abuses. The US Government has sent and put trust in Randt [P]. He must be doing a pretty good job because he’s the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to China. And, all kinds of our clothing tags say: “made in China.”

Paul tells the Corinthians that he, and all those professing Jesus, are God’s ambassadors: people sent to represent God life and forgiveness in the world! Paul tells them that their main job, their mission – “should they chose to accept it” – is to know that they are forgiven sinners empowered to live a new life, because of Jesus death and resurrection for all people.

But Paul’s got a problem with the people he loves as his own children (6:13) in Corinth. They do not think that he’s an ambassador, an apostle sent by God. They’re comparing him to these other super apostles who seem stronger, preach better and

who don't have to work side jobs as tent makers to support themselves.

Paul's been clear, he is weak compared to these seemingly "super-apostles." He has God's treasure in a fragile body (2 Cor 4). He doesn't commend himself; he commends God. It is God who forgave him for killing Christians, it is God who has helped him survive shipwrecks and stoning, it is only God – not some super apostle or Paul – who can give people the new life in Jesus!

The Corinthians had forgotten God's job description of all people: God's ambassadors of reconciliation to the world! They had forgotten to fear the Lord as Paul does. Fear, not in the sense of being afraid of an angry God; but healthy fear, that comes from knowing that one day we will stand before God and talk about how they had fulfilled our job description with the calling and gifts we have been given. Fear that knew God as both: judge AND the one who gives us hope by forgiving us and using us to express his forgiveness words and actions to others!

### **Theological Trouble in the World: We have forgotten our job description**

This text makes us ask ourselves the question: Are we compelled like Paul and others were to share God's message of forgiveness, reconciliation with God and new life! Are we compelled, the words means gripped and thrown out into our worlds as God's ambassadors?

During a recent mission trip, a CRC pastor in our area was enjoying meaningful work with others from the Church. He worked alongside a person who was working hard and enjoying people from

a different culture, race, gender, age and economic level. It was a great experience for him. As this person shared what he was learning and feeling, this pastor was enjoying and thankful for what God was doing in and through his friend [P]. Then he felt compelled that they challenge themselves and apply some of what God was teaching them so they could grow [P].

He asked, Bob, what would it look like if we were to practice Jesus ministry of reconciliation when we get home, like its been practiced to us here? What would it be like for us to open our homes to people of different culture, race, gender, class, age and economic status? What would it be like to practice Jesus' hospitality in our homes: changing our lifestyles to welcome strangers? What would it be like to practice God's generosity and offer something to someone with no expectation of anything in return? (Hospitality and generosity definitions adapted from Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*).

It made me wonder what would it be like to find some friends on the journey and do this together so that we could face some of fears and encourage one-another through the inevitable hard times this would bring?

This text reminds us what a human beings job description is, it tells us who we are: "God's ambassadors, sent to represent Jesus forgiveness and new life to all people in the world!" Sent to experience Jesus life now and share it with others so that they can experience it too!

Being sent. It's one of the four historic marks of the Church: it's called apostolic. For years, and maybe particularly in Church

traditions like ours we have focused on three-quarters of the biblical call to be apostolic. We have done a good job on the first half, remaining faithful to Jesus teaching through the apostles. We've even done pretty well at the third quarter: sending people out to share Jesus live in words and actions in other parts of the world. But we could grow in sending people out as God's ambassadors here at home in our places of work or school, in our Church neighborhood, and in our own neighborhoods in our every day lives! We have neglected the reality that apostolic also means sent as ambassadors for God here and now in our everyday lives.

### **Grace in the Bible: God ambassador, Paul**

In our text today we see God using Paul as an ambassador. God enables Paul to face the criticism of friends and boast about how **God** has forgiven him and lead him to a new life. God has forgiven Paul and others and sent them as ambassadors. God has others, from different backgrounds receive and share his message in Corinth and all over the known world. Here's a few Corinthians, mentioned in other parts of the Bible, who were reconciled through God's ambassador Paul and others: Chloe (1 Cor 1:11); Stephanos and Achaikos (1 Cor 16:17); Jason and Sosipater (Rom 16:21); Erastus (Rom 16:23); Fortunatus (1 Cor 16:17); Aquila and Priska (1 Cor 16:19); Lucius (Rom 16:21); Tertius, Paul's scribe; Gaius (one of Paul's hosts) and Quartus (Rom 16:22-23).

Paul stands before God confident in his weakness because of what Jesus has done for him and what God's doing in the world around him. God helps Paul accept his weakness and supports him.

Just one chapter before our text, God moves Paul's hand to write some beautiful words about his current personal experience of Jesus:

**We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this power is from God and not from us (2 Cor 4:7).** God gives us this same hope, In Jesus we have this treasure in fragile jars of clay!

God forgives sin and empowers us to live his life. God reminds us about our job description and empowers us to start over and live it again! God has always been forgiving sinners. God has been extending his grace to human kind since creation. Jesus died for all so that all would not have to die. One died for all, took on the sin of the world, so that we would not have to die spiritually (14-15). Jesus died, so that we could die to our sinful nature and be raised to life like Jesus. Jesus is only God's first resurrection from the dead: One day all of God's children, Jesus brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29) will be raised from the dead! It's incredible! In this text, God has raised Paul from the dead. Once the killer of Christians and stoner of Steven; he is now compelled by God to lead people to real life, found only in Jesus of Nazareth! Both now and for eternity!

Imagine your life held in an hourglass like sand. Over time, as sand sifts through the center – that represents Jesus – we feel like we're dieing. But then, God – because of what he's done in Jesus, flips us over and empowers us to live a new life knowing that the dieing we need yet to do, the suffering we with Jesus, will all lead to a new and better life now and for eternity. Jesus keeps flipping us over and rising us to new life! **[Demonstrate]**

## **Grace in the world: God's ambassadors among us**

We'll with a four quick stories that help us see how God is including us in his ministry of forgiveness and new life today! No one is doing this perfectly but these stories help us see how God is applying this text in our world today.

First, the pastor I mentioned is using his home to welcome kids from all over his diverse neighborhood. Kids and families from different cultures are being welcomed into his family's home and building friendships. God is living out his ministry of reconciliation and sending out his ambassadors into the world today!

Second, recently, a member of our Church and I got together. As we sipped our cold drinks at a coffee shop, Jocelyn began to talk about how the small group she was part of in Church. She mentioned the different ages and backgrounds in the group. I almost cried as she talked about how the people were vulnerable and honest about their lives. How the group, with people who were not pretending they were strong and had it all together, encouraged her to share her need God's help. She said that their vulnerability helped her be vulnerable and comfortable with her own shortcomings. This group was helping each other experience God forgiveness and new life. God is living out his ministry of reconciliation and sending out his ambassadors into the world today!

Jocelyn also talked recently about a trip she took as a pianist for a school in Oakland. While on the trip she experienced life with people of a different generation, skin color and economic status. But as she played for these kids, many of whom her experience could not relate to, God helped Jocelyn grow, she began to love and suffer with

these kids as she heard their stories. God is living out his ministry of reconciliation and sending out his ambassadors into the world today!

God has also shown our Church his ministry of reconciliation when we volunteer. Last Christmas at the Monument Futures Christmas party, some of us had a blast preparing, serving dinner and getting to know people we don't usually get to know. It was so fun to hear the stories of Hispanic workers and their families. It was fun to get to know that they are not so different from us as they try and care for their families. We serve because it's what Jesus would do, but we learn things about ourselves that we never would have known if we were not responding to God's invitation to make one community, reconciled to Jesus. God is living out his ministry of reconciliation and sending us out his ambassadors into the world today!