

**SERMON TITLE-** "Life In The Real World and Reconciliation"

**TEXT-** 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

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Life in the real world is really messy. Now what I mean by this isn't all bad- only that life is far more complex with far more loose edges than we really can handle. Trying to sort things out in this complex world is a huge challenge that everyone jumps right into with their opinions. It's out of that that countless books are written.

Given this, it doesn't take very long before the concluding wisdom of Ecclesiastes rings so true-

**Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.**

**Ecclesiastes 12:12**

There is no shortage of books and ideas that people are trying to sell us. It is easy to get weary with this endless supply of books and yet we are given the ability to read, write and consider, and there are writers who do capture things.

In the last weeks I have been going through Shakespeare's great tragic play, Macbeth. Shakespeare's genius is the ability to capture the complexity and pathos of life. Few of his plays do so more powerfully than the tragedy of Macbeth.

This is the story of a great Scottish hero at the turn of the first millennium [1000AD] who is destroyed by the temptation that he is drawn into. In his case it was the lure of being king that drove him to murder the existing king and take over the throne of Scotland. What makes the play powerful is that you walk that calamitous journey with him.

At each point in the journey you want to say, "Stop Macbeth- don't do it!" Macbeth does not stop but like a runaway train careens down the hill towards the precipice. We know where this is going to end but like a train wreck happening before our eyes- there is nothing we can do to stop it.

A little plug for literature- Shakespeare wrote 400 years ago about event that took place 1000 years ago and captures the same joys and sorrows that you and I face in 2010.

Macbeth is not a pleasant journey but when you understand the story you also realize that it is a story that to various degrees plays out in the lives of people all around us. It is a tragedy that you watch unfolding with a sense of doom- this story is not going to end well because people are going to choose destruction rather than life.

Of course, the story line is seldom this dramatic- leading to the murder of a king, as in this story- but the fact that the details are far more ordinary doesn't change the plot.

It is the story of quarrels between family members.

It is the story of habits that we know are destroying us.

It is the story of spending more money than we make.

In the early stages things look so harmless but when the dues need to be paid we look back and ask ourselves, "Why did we do that? How did we get to this terrible place?"

It is the story reflected in Jesus' saying-

**Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. Matthew 7:13**

The broad road is really broad and there are so many ways to make a mess of things that despair could so easily overwhelm us.

As I read Macbeth it took me on a journey into 2 Corinthians.

He begins as a hero but then is drawn piece by piece down the road to disaster that ends with the destruction of everything that was good in his life. Shakespeare tells the tale of this painful road to ultimate calamity through the eyes of Macbeth and we, with Macbeth see the journey as hopeless.

It is agonizing to watch, let alone be a part of. It is the agony of a world filled with pain and hopelessness.

Remember how 2 Corinthians began-

**We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 2 Corinthians 1:8**

Life is rough from all kinds of angles and when the roughness of it hits us- we, like Paul and Macbeth understand how it feels to “despair, even of life.”

The roughness of life comes from many places but none so sad as when that “great pressure” is because of the choices that we, and the people around us make. An earthquake or an illness is very sad but not nearly as sad as when we bring pain to those around us by our own “insane” choices.

Life, far too often, is a train wreck.

But the Bible is not a tragic story. It recognizes tragedy but the end is deliverance- **Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death . . . [but] He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. 2 Corinthians 1:9-10**

The story of Macbeth is the story of life but we have another story line- a story line of deliverance. With that story line we want to shout out to Macbeth- “You don’t have to go inevitably to calamity. There is another way.”

There is another way that doesn’t have to lead to plunging into the precipice to our doom.

Knowing this lets us handle the reality of life having tragedies. Those are real, they are tragic- but they don’t have to define life. There is deliverance! We have a different story line.

Last week, Ryan talked about the treasure that we carry as we take this story with us- especially as it focused on the very broken containers that this story is captured in. **Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 2 Corinthians 4:1-7**

We don’t lose heart. We are bearers of an incredible treasure- the treasure of a better way that not only doesn’t need to end in tragedy- it can end in ultimate, absolute victory.

We carry the treasure of that victory around with us.

And that leads to the topic for today. It is the answer to the question- what is the treasure that we are carrying about? What is it that allows this runaway train to get onto

another track?

Paul now addresses it-  
**For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

There's a lot in these 2 verses, some of which we have already touched on- but for today I want to focus on 2 things-

### **#1. There Is A Real Debt To Be Paid**

We are going to come back to this point but it needs to be understood up front. Life is full of vague sadness that we can't pinpoint. This is how I understand depression- a real sadness that fills people's hearts. It is like a wet blanket that weighs us down and immobilizes us. This is very real.

But along side of that is another type of sadness- and that is the direct consequence of what we have done. When we speak harsh words to someone we love and they are wounded and a fight ensues- we are saddened by this- but there is a good reason for our sadness.

[Real life, of course, does not divide up cleanly and these 2 are often mixed together and compound each other- but I do believe that they are still distinct.]

Macbeth was a tormented man who went mad but his madness, in this story, originates in his actions and choices.

While there is a lot of vague sadness in the world- the worst sadness is caused by what people/we have done. There are real consequences to real actions. Those consequences need to be addressed.

Macbeth really killed the King and that needs to be addressed.

We will come back to this- but unless we understand this we will not appreciate what follows.

### **#2. The Treasure Is- The Gift Of Forgiveness For Everyone**

The focus here is on the words, "for all."

No matter who you are, no matter how far down the sad tale of Macbeth you have found yourself- Jesus' death offers us a new beginning.

The treasure that we have is for everyone. That is amazing! It is no wonder that once Paul understood it that he was driven to the ends of the earth to tell the story.

This is the treasure that we carry around with us in those cracked jars.

Have you committed a "Macbeth"? There is a gift of forgiveness prepared for you. This is a gift of a new beginning.

This makes for a whole new way of looking at the people around us.  
**So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:16-17**

And when they understood this, the early Christians were transformed- we get new beginnings and new beginnings that can start, if we accept them from the very depth of the tragedies that the Macbeths of the world find themselves ensnared.

We don't see the world as a place of hopeless tragedy but rather as a place where God has opened the door to new beginnings.

We don't see ourselves as caught up in a hopeless tragedy and we don't see those around us caught up in a hopeless tragedy. This story doesn't just have one ending!

And how does "new creation" happen?

**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19**

**The Treasure Is Reconciliation With God By Debt Payment**

The place of "new creation" that opens the possibility for a different ending than calamity has its place in reconciliation. To understand this we need to go back to the matter of the real debt that we mentioned earlier. The problem with the world is not that sadness fills it- the problem is that the worst of the sadness has its origin in our actions.

Shakespeare follows the pattern of temptation that is described in Genesis. It begins with an idea that seems so attractive- an idea that hardly seems like it could possibly be wrong- it is the idea of just taking a good close look at the forbidden fruit. What could possibly be wrong with that?

But the look leads to a touch, the touch to a taste, and the taste to eating- eating what we knew from the beginning that God has forbidden us to eat. And now, we have thrown a complication into our relationship to God. We have broken something precious and now when God goes looking for Adam and Eve, they run and hide.

Jesus came to offer us a new beginning to that relationship.

The world is full of relationships like that of Adam and Eve and God. People know that something is seriously broken- they knew that they are avoiding contact- but for the most part that is where it stays. In all kinds of different ways- they hide when they hear the sound of a presence near by.

To help us- Paul uses the language of debt.

One step towards solving this means understanding the matter of debt. To understand the offer given one has to understand the nature of debt.

This means that we need to understand something very elementary but easily overlooked about the Biblical view of how our choices work.

When we face the consequences of bad choices we dearly wish that we could just undo what had happened and start over. Today we have a great mechanism that helps us understand debt. It is the Credit Card. The Credit Card is a very specific "debt" record. When our statement arrives, each month, we have an exact tally of what we have spent and what we owe. Too many of us also have accumulated debts on that statement.

Every month when the credit card statement arrives and we look over the charges and the balance we can easily think back on each purchase and with the wisdom of hindsight say, "Why did I buy that meal or that shirt? If I had not, I would be just as happy now and I wouldn't have this bill to pay off. Oh, if only I could undo those decisions!"

The other thing we wish for, which is equally wishful, is that somehow the balance on our credit card is simply wiped off.

Of course that is not how it happens. A credit card balance needs someone to pay it off for it to disappear.

The Credit Card is a great illustration for what happens in broken relationships- an outstanding balance shows up on the card and it is a balance that we are unwilling or unable to pay. The unpaid account hangs over us.

Paul is first of all talking about our relationship to God but that exclusively. He is also talking about our relationships to each other because the same principles apply. To restore relationships- the debt must be resolved.

The story of Jesus' coming to earth is the story of Him coming and paying that debt for us. Jesus comes to earth and brings the payment of our debts with Him. Our Credit Card balance can be paid off- if we accept this.

It is an astonishing offer- something that the Credit Card companies occasionally float out as a way of advertising.

In the case of the NT, however that offer is the Gospel itself.

There is only one catch- we need to accept the offer.

There are several ironies that seem to kick in around this story.

#### 1. The Irony Of Too Great A Debt

If like, Macbeth, you had committed the ultimate crime- which is his day was killing the rightful king- you might conclude that this is too serious a crime to be forgiven from. That is a very familiar story line. As Macbeth and his wife go down the road in this story, it is very clear that they are convinced of this. In fact Shakespeare is convince of this and gives them no way out. The only options are-

- i. give up and commit suicide as Lady Macbeth does
- ii. fight to the bitter end and take as many people down with you as possible- as Macbeth does.

Both of these find their variations in our lives. I have heard the "I'm just too bad" story more often than I wish to recount.

The Bible speaks to that over and over again. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven- except the sin of rejecting God's offer.

Along side of this irony is its mirror image-

#### 2. The Irony Of Too Little a Debt

People look at their lives and the terrible story of Macbeth and conclude- reasonably- that they aren't bad like that and that their petty failing hardly count on the matter of needing forgiveness. The Bible also speaks to this over and over again. This is as great a tragedy as the first. In fact while not everyone commits regicide the minimalization of our failings is equally erroneous. In fact it was against this that Jesus spoke very bluntly.

The treasure of reconciliation with God is the great offer that Jesus brought with Him.

But Paul isn't just trying to explain this treasure- in fact he is writing people who are already supposed to understand it- having received it themselves. What Paul wants his readers to understand are 2 remarkable things-

## **#1. We Have Been Given The Ministry Of Reconciliation**

I don't think that we can truly grasp the import of what this statement is telling us. It is also at the end of a sermon with one more point to add.

In some ways, however there is no need to worry too much. We have a treasure and as long as we are rubbing shoulders with our friends and neighbours, as people who have been reconciled to God- that ministry will be rubbing off in those around us.

I believe that the metaphors that Jesus gave us- of being salt and light indicate how that ministry of reconciliation works its way out of God's people to those around us.

Salt performs its work merely by being salt and scattered about. It does not do its work when it is contained in a salt shaker.

Light does the job of being light when it is allowed to shine. Light hidden behind a curtain cannot light a room.

But there is an area that I believe Kingdom people do need to sharpen their attention. When we walk about in a world of unreconciled people we cannot simply stand by and let things be. We have been given a gift and we know that there is a better way and like the Good Samaritan we need to stop and lend a hand, whenever we can. We cannot simply keep walking.

But there is another part that we are instructed to add-

**And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19**

## **#2. We Have Been Given The Message Of Reconciliation**

As those who have been reconciled to God, as those who have signed on to this offer and have been given a new beginning- we have alongside of this been given a message to carry with us.

Most often when we walk among people who live with unreconciliation- we will find the problems well beyond our capacity to sort out.

In spite of that we are not given permission to walk away- any more than we are allowed to drive away from an injured person just because we are not medical practitioners.

But even when we can tell that we don't have any specific advice to people regarding their particular battles- we have a message- life doesn't need to be a tragedy. There is an offer of reconciliation.

That is an incredible message that we have been given to pass on.

Paul carries on and closes off with this-

**We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21**