

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

It's no secret our society is hurting a lot. The pandemic has a lot to do with this. It has brought pain and loss to grieving families. It has hurt **the economy** in general – business owners and employees – people with health insurance challenges. It has brought special challenges to teachers and students, athletes, and sports fans. Fear and a sense of isolation, helplessness, loneliness, are all around us. You can fill in your details.

But the world and society are not abstract things – **we're talking about people, real people** who are our neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and family members. I think we are also familiar with the reality that **"hurting people hurt people."** We see a lot of that. Too many people turn to violence, domestic and otherwise. Hurting people often make bad choices. Lonely people may turn to social media and the internet for conversations, company, and comfort – but the Internet and Social Media are consistently ranked high as dispensers of wrong information, bad information that can lead people along deceptive or dangerous paths.

My wife and I often usher for the Milwaukee Repertory (Rep) and get to watch a lot of plays. We are impressed with how accurately and eloquently authors and actors can identify and express things that are wrong in our culture. But we have never walked away giving thanks that a play provided any remedy or solution. On the way home after a play one night I whined in the car that they gave us no answers to the serious questions people ask. My wife simply turned to me and say, "That's not their job; that's ours." Yes, it is – because the truth is that real solutions require a change of heart and a change in value systems in people – and God has called us to make that kind of difference.

How Can We Help Our Hurting Neighbors?

- 1. We can point them to justice.**
- 2. We can assure them of peace.**
- 3. We can show them love.**

Our focus today: how can we help? How can we be agents of change? What can we share with people around us who are hurting? St. Paul gives us sets a great example in today's reading. My intention is to focus especially on three wonderful things we can share with our hurting neighbors.

First, let's talk about **JUSTICE**.

How Can We Help Our Hurting Neighbors?

- 1. We can point them to justice.**

2. **We can assure them of peace.**

3. **We can show them love.**

What a wonderful word and concept. And the word is used a lot these days.

“No Justice , No Peace”

is a rally cry of protestors currently seeking changes in our culture to counter systemic racism and abuse of power. Is it a threat? A lament? Or simply a statement of truth? No matter. People seem to understand that justice and peace go together. The Bible has taught us the same thing.

All people, including those who remain spiritually dead and have little or no time for the Bible or Jesus, know that this world needs more fairness and honesty. God made people to be wired with that strong desire for this world to be just and fair. Every parent knows that children at an early age learn to speak the language of "fairness" when they are not treated equally. The longing for justice never disappears. Even when it seems a futile effort, victims of unjust oppression sense it is wrong and seek righteous remedies.

The desire for justice gives us something to talk about with those around us. Why?

Because God demonstrated his justice in the most astonishing and wonderful way!

Because God can do whatever he wants to, he could have simply forgiven us for all our sins. Like a kindly or permissive grandparent in the sky he could have said, “Hey, no one’s perfect, right? So forget it. I forgive you and won’t hold it against you.” But God did not do that at all. He demanded justice. Sin and disobedience deserve the death sentence. And God required payment for our moral debts before he declared us forgiven. He insisted that our crimes against him be punished in full before he pronounced us not guilty and free from eternal punishment.

“God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice . . . so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26).

When God looks at sinners, he sees people whose sins are genuinely paid for, whether they believe it or not, whether they receive it personally and enjoy it or not. And we can do the same kind of thing when we interact with hurting people around us. Listen again to how St. Paul said this:

(2 Corinthians 5:14-16) For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

Christians don’t simply believe that Jesus died. But Christians believe that when Jesus died, as far as God is concerned, we all died; the whole world died. Our family members died, our schoolmates, our coworkers, our neighbors and friends without exception. It is no overstatement or empty claim to say when Jesus died, you and I died, our loved ones died, and every person worldwide died. This is the truth – this is reality – from God’s perspective. To satisfy justice.

Yes, we have a lot to contribute to the “No justice, no peace” conversation. We can appeal to “God’s ally” within every person, the conscience. And can assure our fellow sinners that divine justice was

combined with perfect love to win for them forgiveness when they fall short of justice and forfeit peace. Freely we have received so we may freely share. For us it's not simply a matter of whether we should say "Black Lives Matter" or "All Lives Matter" phrases that can both be misunderstood too easily. For us

It's good to say, "YOUR life matters or OUR lives matter – and it matters so much to God that he dealt with our sin and guilt by satisfying JUSTICE and providing forgiveness at the same time. We matter and may enjoy PEACE with God forever.

The mention of PEACE is also a common one in our hurting society. Again, we can help people.

How Can We Help Our Hurting Neighbors?

1. We can point them to justice.
2. We can assure them of peace.
3. We can show them love.

Look again at how Paul affirmed the reality of peace! He uses the language of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** ¹⁸ **All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:** ¹⁹ **that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**

Reconciliation is another good word we love. The emphasis here is a change in the sinner's relationship to God or status in God's eyes. Without Christ's self-sacrifice and satisfying justice, sinners would have no escape from their alienation or separation from God. So God himself took the lead and did what needed to be done:

2 Corinthians 5:19 **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**

When we are told that this message of reconciliation has been committed or entrusted to us, that points to the practical way we can help our hurting neighbor – we can speak of that highest kind of peace, peace with God. Even if social peace or political peace remains elusive and imperfect, and is sometimes a non-starter for many hurting people, we are at peace with God who reconciled us to himself in Christ. The peace we justified sinners enjoy rests on the justice provided by Christ's substitutionary atonement. Here is peace of conscience, reconciliation with God, and forgiveness that can be shared with other sinners.

"When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best," has been a familiar slogan used since 1944 by Hallmark Greeting Cards. And when Christians, desire to give others the very best, we may not send a greeting card, but we show them love.

And that brings us to the third thing we can share to help our hurting neighbor: LOVE.

How Can We Help Our Hurting Neighbors?

1. We can point them to justice.
2. We can assure them of peace.
3. We can show them love.

Ideally, of course, as Christians we desire to love everyone and for the best of reasons. As St. John wrote, [1 John 4:19](#) **“We love because he [God] first loved us”**.

But the reality is often different, and we know it.

“It’s easier to love the Hottentot than to tolerate the annoying neighbor next door.”

I read words like these over 50 years ago and still appreciate the point the writer was making. [**Hottentot** is a **now archaic and offensive name for the Khoikhoi**, an indigenous people of South Africa.] It is often easy to love people hypothetically or abstractly but struggle to care for others who are close by and more familiar to us.

If we are honest, we can quickly think of people whose personalities, habits, or value systems make relating to them difficult. On the other hand, we often imagine having great love when that love points towards abstract causes and distant peoples. For example, it is quite easy for me to love “the homeless” as long as they remain an idea or a concept. Spending time with or eating with someone who hasn’t showered in weeks or suffers from mental illness or chemical dependency puts my love to a test.

Atheistic existentialist Jean Paul Sartre famously (or infamously) wrote: “Hell is other people.”

Jean Paul Sartre: “Hell is other people.”

In his play, No Exit, Sartre saw hell as the place in which one must spend eternity with people one would, in real life, seldom if ever care to spend any time with. We may see this concept as high in sarcasm and short on love, but honesty demands that we confess our sinful nature thinks like this every day.

How differently our Lord thought and taught! Jesus made it clear that my “neighbor” is anyone and everyone I come into contact with. They are NOT just like me, don’t always agree with me, and don’t see the world as I see it. Rather, my neighbor is a person with habits, views, and quirks that will not only get on my nerves, but also tempt me to despise in my heart. True love patterned after God’s love is a real virtue when expressed in real, human relationships.

It is no secret our society is growing more strained during our exposure to COVID, racism, supremacists, protests, and nasty political ads. Interpersonal relations are hurting among our neighbors and fellow citizens. I am tempted to love abstractly – the oppressed, the oppressor, all hurting people who hurt others – rather than serve people right in front of me. I know Christ’s love was messy and ultimately cost him his life. I seek to imitate him, but my sinful nature gravitates to less mess and minimal sacrifice. In Christ that way of looking at things – and other people – changes! Here (again) is the reason:

2 Corinthians 5:15-16 **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. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.**

Maybe a simple illustration using sunglasses can help us visualize why our perspective has changed. When we look through colored lenses, the appearance of everything we look at is changed. Similarly, God is looking at us through Christ – he no longer sees guilt because Christ has removed that. He sees Christ’s righteousness because that perfection or holiness has been credited to us as a gift. God sees how perfectly his justice has been satisfied. So his view of us has changed. And when we look at others, we also look through Christ and begin to see things the way God sees them. Because Christ’s work counts

for them as much as it counts for us, we look at them and see sinners who are forgiven – even if they aren't aware of that and even if they refuse to believe and enjoy it.

So how can we be genuinely loving agents of change for my neighbor and culture? Let's take a final look at what today's Bible reading taught us:

How Can We Help Our Hurting Neighbors?

1. We can point them to justice.
2. We can assure them of peace.
3. We can show them love.

Is it hard to live life this way? Actually, it's impossible for us to live life that way if we rely on our own power. And if we review the words of this Bible section we'll see what makes the difference. Notice the main points here when we abbreviate the sentences to see who is doing what:

2 Corinthians 5:14–18 . . . Christ's love compels us because . . . he died for all . . . So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

Obviously, the most important thing is keeping connected to our Lord. A week ago our home lost connection to the internet because there was an outage with our provider. Then, after the provider restored internet coverage to our home, we still couldn't get internet because the modem failed. That also needed to be fixed or replaced. In a similar way God is the Provider of true Justice, Peace, and Love. And he never fails to give these gifts to anyone and everyone – but he gives them through his Word and the Lord's Supper with the Holy Spirit using that Word and Sacrament. The gospel is kind of like the modem that channels the grace of God to our hearts and lives, maintains faith, and enriches us with a firm grasp on Jesus – so we enjoy justice, peace, and love. Thanks be to God! As St. Paul put it, "***All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.***" Let us pray.