

Sermon: Ambassadors for Christ

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles Ottawa, March 30, 2025)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Let me start today's message by asking this question: Have you gotten a group chat invite on the Signal messaging app yet? I say that in jest, poking fun at the recent scandal, more like the latest embarrassment plaguing the U.S. administration.

It was reported last week by the editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic, that he was mistakenly invited into a group chat on the Signal platform, by the National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, where the U.S. actions against Yemen's Houthi rebel group, the so called 'war plan', was being openly shared. That infamous group chat would seem to include a number of top U.S. officials, such as Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, and Vice President JD Vance.

At first, the other news outlets were cautious in reporting this story, using qualifiers such as 'it would appear to be', or 'from an account bearing the name of JD Vance'. I suppose the thinking was: they couldn't be that dumb, that shockingly reckless, could they, using an unsanctioned, commercial messaging app to share classified information that could jeopardize an impending military operation, could they? As it turns out they could, and they did.

What's even more embarrassing, in that particular chat group, officials led by JD Vance were openly questioning the President's understanding of the situation, putting them at odd with their commander-in-chief. It's not a good look. Knowing Trump, he is probably livid inside, but he kept his cool. He responded by attacking Goldberg (classic Trump), then chucking the whole thing up to a mere technology glitch. Except that it wasn't just a glitch. The Justice Department may yet look into this whole fiasco as a serious breach of U.S. national security, and hold someone accountable.

Meanwhile, the whole world, including this not-at-all-important preacher in the Glebe, are laughing at the Trump administration. To be sure, the fault does not lie with the President; he seems to have done

nothing wrong. But the likes of Waltz, Vance, Rubio and Ratcliffe are the heart of the administration. They may not have the title of ambassadors, but their actions, their conducts, their chat nevertheless still represent the U.S. Administration, and to a larger extend the boss who appointed them, the President of the United States.

Joking aside, allow me to put this more serious question to you: How have you live up to the Christian calling as ambassadors for Christ? Let me rephrase it in another way, If the world should get a glimpse of your action, your conduct, or your private chat, would they be impressed, or would you be embarrassed?

We are the ‘ambassadors for Christ’, as the Apostle Paul calls it, since God is making his appeal through us (2 Corinthian 5:20), and it is in indeed a calling. What are some characteristics of such a calling?

First and foremost, we regard no one from a human point of view. As Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*we may have once knew Christ from a human point of view*”—as Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth, or a Rabbi from Galilee—“*we know him no longer in that way.*”

Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. By overcoming death, he now sits on the right-hand side of God, he now sits in glory as both the Lamb of God, and the Lord of all. So, as Paul continues in verse 17, “*if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*”

Note the radical cosmology of the Apostle Paul! He did not say that, “If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.” As in the old-self is dead, a new-self emerges. What Paul actually says, in the original Greek is “If anyone is in Christ, new creation!” The demonstrative “there is” is added by translators, and it is, might I add, appropriate in context. Allow me rephrase it in my own way, “If any one person is in Christ, the new creation comes to be—voila, it exists, and there it is.

The concept of ‘new creation’ finds its root in Isaiah’s vision of the new heaven and new earth, in Isaiah 65, where God proclaims to the community in exile facing extreme hardship in foreign land, as in verse 17,

*“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating,
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy
and its people as a delight.”*

This new Jerusalem finds its ultimate expression in the vision of John of Patmos, as recorded in Revelation 21:1-5,

*“Then I saw a new heaven and new earth
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.
And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them and be their God;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain
will be no more, for the first things have passed away.
And the one who was seated on the throne said,
“See, I am making all things new.””*

Having established his radical cosmology, Paul then intensifies his theology with an universal reconciliation centred on God, as in verse 18 of 2 Corinthian 5, *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”*

This word, this verb: “to reconcile” is used to describe the relation between God and humankind, and is only ever used with God as the subject, the initiator and author of reconciliation. It is important to note that God has not reconciled the God-self to the world, but rather that God has reconciled the sin-sick-world to himself, through Christ, by not counting their trespasses against them, by removing that which estranges us from God.

But how do we put this square peg of universal salvation to the round hole of final judgement, where all must appear before the throne of God to answer for their thoughts, actions and conducts? If all shall be saved in the end, then faith and law and judgement and grace are all moot.

I think the answer, as argued brilliantly by Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his 2014 book titled, *“Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?”*, is hope. The Scripture gives us neither the assurance that all will be saved, nor the certainty that any are condemned. What Balthasar argues is that if we

should deny this hope, the hope that all be saved, then we have no right to have confidence in our own salvation. To give up hope for any other person, no matter wretched they may be, is to give up hope for ourselves. Hope is the key.

Into this hope, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and entrusted to us this message, this good news, that in Christ, all can come to God, unashamed, forgiven, and reconciled. What a marvellous hope it is, what a wonderful reality awaits us. Allow me to paint this hope with words from Casey Thompson, contributing to a pastoral perspective on 2 Corinthians 5 in “Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary”. This is what she wrote:

“In prayer, the church can see a world
where death and pain and mourning are no more;
a world free from addictions;
a world where mothers and daughters, fathers and sons,
find love where there was mistrust;
a world where marriages are joys instead of burdens;
a world where everyone has a decent place to live;
a world where children can be taught in safety by teachers
who do not cry themselves to sleep;
a world where people do not suffer in pain
because medication is too costly;
a world where women are not coerced into lives they cannot bear;
a world where children do not settle wars that men create;
a world where imagination is as powerful
as market indicators and machine guns;
a world where everything becomes new by an act of faith,
the act of trusting that the futures God whispers to the church
can be brought into being.”

We are ambassadors for Christ, being sent out by the Lord, to the street, to this neighbourhood of the Glebe, proclaiming hope of such a kingdom, of such a reality. All it takes is one, who is in Christ, and there it is, voila, the new creation. And I see one here, there, and everywhere.

Last month, I had the pleasure of being invited to speak at the “Feast and Faith”, a student ministry at Ottawa University, organized by Ryan Farrell, an ordained chaplain of the Christian Reformed Church. I had

prepared the topic “Who are my neighbours?”, based on the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, and connecting it to our neighbourly relationship with the United States.

The discussion was timely and participations from mostly students were vigorous. I had a lot of fun, particularly of the question I posed: “If you get to have 5 minutes with the U.S. President Donald Trump, to impress on him the virtue of neighbourliness, what would you say?”

The reason I posed that question, on top of wanting to hear what students have to say, is that I did not know what I would say or do, should I be given the chance. The replies I got back from those students were truly a mixed bag: some would remind the President of the teachings of Jesus; some hold out hope that charm offensive is the way to go; some wanted to punch him in the face (not recommended, and certainly not agreeable by me); while others had all but given up on trying to convince the President to behave. It was a good discussion, but I have to admit that I didn’t find what I was looking for.

However, in preparation for this Sunday’s message, I came across Karl Barth’s response, when he was once asked what he would say to Adolf Hitler, if he ever had the chance to meet the dictator who was ravaging Europe at the time, and who would conquer the world if not stopped (I know, I know, I shouldn’t be comparing Trump to Hitler! I understand it is of a totally different scenario, different degree, and a trade war is not an actual war).

What I want to highlight is Barth’s response. Instead of what most would assume to be a scathing prophetic judgement against a truly evil man with a awful appetite for destruction, Barth replied (this is where I am reminded again why I came to admire Barth during my seminary study in the first place), that he would say nothing other than to quote Romans 5:8, *“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”*

While we still were sinners, Christ died for us. What a message of forgiveness, of reconciliation. What an ambassador for Christ. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**