

1

Imagine being invited to serve as an ambassador to another country. In this role, you would serve as an official representative from one country to another country. By sending our official representative to a country, we hope the ambassador will enhance communication, will strive to correct misunderstandings, and will help keep peaceful relations. Would you accept such an invitation, knowing the struggles of our world today?

Just imagine how difficult that job might be today if you were the ambassador to Russia. What would you say? How would you keep peace in a situation where war is now the norm?

John Sullivan finds himself in this difficult situation as the U.S. ambassador to Russia. Our President recently used harsh language to condemn the acts of Russian aggression against Ukraine by saying “Putin is a ‘war criminal,’ stating plainly what he had alluded to earlier...while condemning Russia’s bombing of ‘apartment buildings, maternity wards, hospitals, and other civilian targets.”¹ Sullivan was later handed a note indicating

that the Russian leader felt our President’s remarks were “unacceptable” and that ties between our countries are “on the verge of breaking.”

What’s an ambassador to say in such a situation? If one sides too strongly with their own nation, one risks rupturing the relationship with the other nation. But if one ignores the cruelty of the warring nation, we face the risk of appearing as though we’re ignoring the severity of the incidents.

Our U.S. ambassador found a way “to demand that the Russian government follow international law and basic human decency...and allow...access to all U.S. citizen detainees in Russia.”² That’s what ambassadors do—try to encourage another nation to follow the rules while striving to protect the interests of one’s own people. Especially in the difficult situation that exists in today’s world, reconciliation remains an important role of the ambassador, even when it seems impossible.

When we wonder why it’s so hard for warring nations to find reconciliation, sometimes we don’t have to look much further than our own lives. Have you ever had a time when reconciliation seemed

2

difficult with people in your life? Ever experienced what felt like brokenness in a connection with someone? Maybe you've even felt a disconnection with God at one time or another. Reconciliation is the process of restoring friendship or harmony, resolving conflicts and making peace, and this often may seem like an impossible task.

When the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, he also knew something about broken relationships, and he invited them to think about the process of reconciliation. It's difficult for us to mend broken relationships by ourselves, and Paul suggested that God helps us become a new creation, a new person, a whole person. As he wrote about everything becoming new and the old passing away, Paul explained, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." Even when we feel disconnected from God, God has already connected us, reconciled us, made peace with us. Paul used the verb *reconciled* in the past tense. It's done, for God has already made us whole.

But in the next sentence, Paul wrote, "God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by

not counting people's sins against them." Here the verb is in the present tense, *reconciling*. It's ongoing, still happening. In other words, God brought us together as friends in the past, and God continues to do so now.

But in both cases, did you notice what else Paul said about reconciliation? God "has given us the ministry of reconciliation," and God is also "entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

Not only did God offer reconciliation in the past and continues to do so now, but God has invited us to join in the process. Paul suggested that we are ambassadors of Christ, meaning that God negotiates with the world through us!

That may feel like an overwhelming responsibility. To be an ambassador for Jesus. To offer healing to the world on behalf of God. How in the world do we do that? That's a question our two congregations of Central Christian and First Christian have recently been wondering. At Central, as we envision passing on our building to another congregation, I have invited the Council and Elders to envision how we might continue to be church,

3

even without the control of a building. Rather than expecting people to *come* to us in a *building*, I've wondered how we might *go* to *others* to serve as ambassadors. For example,

- A children's home is searching for people to make greeting cards so every child living there will receive a birthday card. Imagine being a child and receiving your card from an ambassador.
- Some schools are looking for people to read stories to children. How many of you enjoy reading?

What wonderful ways to serve as an ambassador for Christ—bringing joy to children with a birthday card who may be facing difficult lives. Or offering a smile and helping a child to read a book.

Last month the women at First Christian listened to a speaker from an agency that offers hope to those without homes, along with helping others who struggle with difficult life issues. Next month

they are visiting a place that offers hope to families with special needs children. These are wonderful ways to learn how to be an ambassador.

As both our congregations encounter needs within our communities, how might we offer hope and reconciliation to those who experience difficulties? How might we serve as ambassadors, as Paul suggested when he wrote to the Corinthians? He reassured them that Christ had reconciled them, had made them friends, and he invited them to do the same with others. That invitation still beckons us today. We may not be called as ambassadors to bring peace to warring nations, but God does invite each of us to serve as ambassadors just outside our doorsteps. As our nation prepares to welcome thousands of refugees from Ukraine, imagine how we might become ambassadors to them. As we continue our journey toward Easter, how might you respond to God's invitation to be an ambassador?

¹ <https://www.axios.com/biden-putin-war-criminal-ukraine-e45248b5-ad96-4a80-a8e0-067629e45282.html>

² <https://www.axios.com/russia-putin-biden-ties-breaking-war-criminal-b0c36ee4-c281-4b5f-889c-f13baec8c1cc.html>