

GRADUATION MESSAGE MANUSCRIPT
Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary
May 4, 2024

Sermon Title: "Reconciled, Redeemed, Renewed: The Call to be Ambassadors of Reconciliation"

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

(Good morning everyone. Selamat Pagi (as we say in Indonesia). Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat (as we say in Tagalog)... Greet in Korean... Greet in Caviteño...)

About two weeks, the Lausanne Movement, a movement that connects influencers and ideas for global missions, a movement initiated by the late Rev. Dr. Billy Graham, released an important document entitled "The State of the Great Commission," which brings together the best global data and key strategic thinkers to understand where the greatest gaps and opportunities are for the Great Commission's fulfillment.

Some Snapshots of the Report:

In that report, it is exciting to read the Rise of Asia, where the rapid church growth is happening in several Asian nations – South Korea, the Philippines, Hongkong, the Big C, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and in Myanmar. Not only church growth has been observed but also the growing Asian cross-cultural missionaries sent to other countries.

However, due to the changing landscape of culture and economy in Asia, new mission strategy is needed to achieve the Great Commission. The main interest in missiological and theological discussions in the 90's in the Asian church was 'contextualization'. It emphasized the nationalization of churches and the practice of positive values of some of the traditional cultures in the ministry.

Today, the new mission focus is 'globalization' because the world has shrunk to a global village with the massive development in communication, technology and transportation. Each country has unique characteristics, and each denomination and churches must develop new mission strategies.

The State of the Great Commission report also includes the emerging demographics, the situation of certain age groups in different regions and countries. Global aging is occurring rapidly and will undeniably be a shaping force in our future world. The United Nations Population Division estimates that the number of persons aged 65+ is expected to double over the next three decades, such that by 2050 of the global population 65+ will be 16-22 percent. Global aging will also impact the church, discipleship, and the Great Commission. This report informs the church about the reality, the opportunities and the challenges of global aging, with the hope that the church will be faithful to her Lord and our Great Commission.

On the other hand in some countries, we see also the rapid increase of the children and youth. Psalm 78:4–7 give us a compelling purpose to focus our attention on children and youth in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, emphasizing “we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done... so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.” This need to prioritize focus on the next generation was confirmed by the result of the Lausanne Movement listening conversations that took place in 2020 and 2021. From these listening calls, evangelical leaders from all regions of the world identified reaching, discipling, and listening to children and youth as one of the two top identified needs for the Great Commission.

According to the United Nations, there are more than 3 billion children and young people in the world today, accounting for almost 40 percent of the global population, 90 percent of whom live in developing countries. The number of adolescents and youth today is at an all-time high. However, more and more young people are disaffiliating themselves from the church today. They do not go to other denomination. They just simply leave the church.

Also, the State of the Great Commission observed the rapid technological advancements and the redefinition of human sexual identity are challenging previously held beliefs regarding human distinctiveness. These shifts are driving this generation’s defining question, ‘What does it mean to be human nowadays?’

The rise of technologies utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) are changing how people connect with each other both in positive and in unsettling ways. Advances in AI capacity and applications raise new questions about control and power, privacy, bias and discrimination, economic wellbeing, and our conception of what it means to be human. Sadly, some people are thinking that AI is more intelligent than human beings. Young people are no longer valuing personal analysis and deep reflection of the Word of God and but rather trust Artificial Intelligence to provide them the answers to life’s questions and realities. While I do not see AI pose an existential threat to humanity, we can use AI to accelerate our work, but we must be aware of the concerning ways it is shaping our understandings of God, ourselves, and the world around us.

Sexuality and gender is also a big topic of humanity nowadays. More and more culture are now shifting and giving unlimited freedom in sexual expression. Today’s ideal in sexuality is ‘freedom’ from all external constraints—family expectations, societal norms, biology, and divine authority.

The effects of this sexual revolution are vast, deep, and damaging:

- Marriage rates and fertility rates are plummeting across the Western world and some Asia-Pacific countries.
- Promiscuous sexual behavior—the culture of casual sex, ‘hook up culture’, polyamory, which is the practice of having multiple intimate relationships, whether sexual or just romantic, with the full knowledge and consent of all parties involved—is mainstream in many urban and youth cultures.

- Pornography and the associated sex trafficking and pornified expectations of sex, and the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children are equally widespread. Even the sacred covenant of marriage is sometimes reframed as a consensual non-monogamous relationship.
- Same-sex sexual behavior has become mainstream in many urban and youth cultures in the West and even in some Asia-Pacific countries. Especially in their teens, many young people identify as bisexual, as this tends to 'keep all doors open' relationally.

In an era of rapid cultural shifts, where traditional values often clash with new ideologies, In a world fragmented by divisions and strife, the biblical concept of reconciliation remains not only relevant but essential. The words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 resonate with profound implications for how we live and interact in today's ever-changing society. This passage invites us to embrace reconciliation not as an outdated relic of religious tradition, but as a dynamic and transformative experience that bridges divides and heals communities.

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (ESV)

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

I. Reconciled to Restore (v. 18a)

Brief Explanation: Reconciliation is fundamentally a work of God. "All this is from God," Paul says, emphasizing the divine initiative in restoring broken relationships. Reconciliation implies a previous state of alienation; between humanity and God, this rift was caused by sin. However, through Christ's sacrificial death, God has not only bridged this gap but has transformed us into agents of reconciliation.

Biblical Cross-References:

- Romans 5:10 - "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."
- Colossians 1:21-22 - "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him."

Theological Insight: Augustine once said, "God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering." It underscores that Christ, though sinless, suffered to reconcile us to God.

Contemporary Reflection: In an era where individualism reigns, the idea of reconciliation calls us to consider others. Our relationships, particularly in digital platforms, often foster polarization rather than understanding and unity.

Illustration: Imagine a community divided over local governance. Through a church-led initiative, opposing parties gather, share grievances, dialogue, and pray together. The process does not erase differences but fosters respect and collaboration.

II. Redeemed to Reflect (v. 18b)

Brief Explanation: The ministry of reconciliation is not merely a task we do; it is a reflection of what we have become through Christ. We are redeemed not to hoard this grace but to mirror it in our interactions.

Biblical Cross-References:

- Ephesians 2:10 - "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
- Matthew 5:16 - "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Theological Insight: John Stott wisely observed, "We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." This global vision begins with local acts of redemption reflecting Christ's love.

Contemporary Reflection: Our culture is obsessed with image and status. Yet, the gospel calls us to a redeemed identity that seeks to elevate others, not ourselves.

Illustration: Consider a businessman who integrates faith and work by treating employees with unprecedented generosity and fairness, reflecting God's grace and promoting a transformative business culture. Imagine what kind of economy we would have.

III. Renewed to Reconcile (v. 19)

Brief Explanation: Finally, Paul reveals the heart of the message: in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself. This divine reconciliation invites a personal and communal renewal that continuously aligns us with God's purposes.

Biblical Cross-References:

- Isaiah 43:19 - "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Theological Insight: C.S. Lewis noted, "God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain." This renewal is both protective and purifying.

Contemporary Reflection: As society shifts towards secularism, the church's role in reconciling truth with grace becomes even more critical.

Illustration: A young adult returns to her faith after years of spiritual indifference. Through her renewed faith, she starts a community group that helps other young adults navigate faith and doubt, fostering reconciliation.

Closing Remarks:

As we consider our role in God's grand narrative of reconciliation, let us be continuously Reconciled, Redeemed, and Renewed.

Invitation:

I invite you, APNTS graduates, fellow leaders of the church and missionaries, faculty and staff of this wonderful seminary, fellow Nazarenes and fellow followers of Christ, and other guests who are here to reflect on your role in this ministry of reconciliation.

Where can you be an agent of God's peace and grace?

Let us pray for the courage to live out our redeemed lives with intentional grace and truth. May we walk in the ministry of reconciliation, reflecting the love of Christ in a world desperate for genuine love, genuine relationship and human connection, and peace.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father,

We come before You with grateful hearts, celebrating the journey and dedication of those who are graduating today from Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. Thank You for guiding them through their studies and enriching their spirits with Your wisdom.

Lord, as these graduates step forward into their calling, we pray for the ministry of reconciliation that You have entrusted to us through Christ Jesus. May they be bold and compassionate ambassadors of Your love, bringing healing where there is brokenness and unity where there is division. Equip them, O God, with the grace and truth needed to reflect Christ in every word and action.

Grant them the courage to bridge gaps, mend relationships, and restore Your people to Yourself and to one another. Let their lives be a testament to the reconciling work of Jesus, who has broken down every barrier and made us one in Him.

We ask for Your blessings upon their paths, that wherever they go, they may sow seeds of peace and hope. Fill them with Your Spirit, sustain them with Your joy, and use them mightily for Your kingdom.

In the name of Jesus, our Redeemer and Reconciler, we pray, Amen.