

Ears of Christ
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Someone once said that a person is truly lucky if they develop one true friendship in a lifetime. How are you doing in that theory? How many people do you consider to be truly loyal, confidant friends: people who accept you as you are, who are not envious of us, who are happy when something good happens to you, sad when you are hurt, worry when you worry? Do you have someone you can confide in and reveal your deepest truths, fears, dreams, desires? Do you have many friends that will forgive you if you unknowingly hurt them, say something hurtful, or ignore them? Or how many friends do you have that will never desert you, no matter what you get yourself into, that will be there if you lose your job, all your money, your home, your health, your arrested and convicted of a crime? Do you know someone that would give you a kidney, bone marrow, or anything else you ask of them without question without a doubt? How many people do you have in your life that you can honestly say fits all these qualifications? Most people are lucky if they have one in their lifetime.

Some people are lucky enough to have found that person. Someone you knew since childhood, someone you went to college with, or even fought through a war together. Some people have this in their spouse, a rare friend that knows and cares for you better than you yourself.

Now can you imagine anyone having found that one such friend, having the opportunity to be in such a close relationship, having been given that blessing of trust and love, then reject it? Can you image someone that has found that true friend then turn away from it, take it for granted, ignore it, or disassociate with it all together? It is hard to believe but that happens all the time in our sinfulness. Friendships are broken, marriages end in divorce, families are split up, division happens all around us. Human sinfulness has divided people over and over again. It has divided us from each other and from God.

Christ is sent to reconcile us back to God. To make right once again that was broken. To make right the ugliness of sin. Christ comes into this world to offer us a freedom from this brokenness and to enter into a loving relationship of hope and trust once again.

Our second reading has Paul pleading with the early Christians to be reconciled with God. To remember that Christ was sent to bear our sins, the one who had no sins, took upon

himself our sinfulness so that might become righteous of God. Christ is the answer to our prayers and our pleadings. Whether we know it or not, Christ is the fulfillment of our dreams, our hopes, our life. So often we take it all for granted. We forget what a blessing this life that is dust and will return to dust is. We so often forget the gift of that hope that is eternal in Christ.

During this Lenten Season on Wednesday nights we will be examining the body of Christ. The eyes of Christ, the heart of Christ, the feet of Christ, the mouth of Christ, the hands of Christ, but tonight I want you to simply think about the ears of Christ. Jesus came to reestablish us in that relationship that we as humans had rejected, that we had ignored, forgotten. Jesus came to give us a connection to God, to reconcile us with the blessings of God that had only been seen since at the very beginning, when humanity walked with God and talked with God in relationship before the fall. But in our sinfulness we rejected God's love, God's gifts of peace, God's gifts of hope that is eternal. Instead we get caught up into our own wants and demands, and ignore God.

But Jesus came to win for us that connection once again. He hears us cry in our selfishness and in our pains. He hears us when we cry in our guilt and our shame. He hears us cry when we call out in our anger and even when we sigh with unknown prayers. Jesus is that friend that is always there ready to receive us back again, to make things right again, to restore us even though we have turned away from him.

Tonight we heard in our second reading that he hears us. "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, on the day of salvation I have helped you." The Lord listens and hears us when we cry out.

The promise is that the Lord listens to us no matter what we are doing or what emotions we are feeling. "Why me, Lord?" Is as just as much a pray that the Lord hears as is "I am angry with you Lord!" People that are angry or happy, sad or glad, lamenting or praising, the Lord hears it all.

Just look at the life of Jesus. We know that Jesus heard with a ear of caring for all people. When the blind man cried out hearing that Jesus was near, he shouted out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me?" And Jesus heard his plea and healed the man. When yet another man with leprosy knelt before the Lord, pleading, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." Jesus looked with pity on the man and reached out and cleansed the man. Jesus heard people of all kinds, the outcasts and the forgotten, the Roman centurion's child and the leader of the Synagogue Jarius' daughter, he healed Peter's mother in law of a fever,

and called the widow's son back to life. Jesus heard the needs of the people and he healed them giving them strength and cleansing them over and over again.

But Jesus also heard other things. He heard sad news, remember when he heard that John had been executed and killed he mourned and declared him a great prophet. Or when Jesus heard that Lazarus had died, Jesus wept. Or when the rich young ruler couldn't give up everything and follow him, Jesus exclaimed that it is indeed easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus heard the crowds that were quick to praise him, Hosanna, to the Son of David. Hosanna. But these same crowds Jesus also heard declare Crucify him, Crucify him. He heard their wants and their hatreds. He heard their doubts when they couldn't cast out the demons, or when Peter rebukes him, or when the religious leaders call him a son of satan, or when Peter denies him, or when Judas sold him out for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus hears it all. He hears the mobs call for his death and yet he overcomes all those things to lay down his life for all people.

How many of us can say we know a friend that can be like this. That listens to us and knows us in all our ugliness, our doubts, our dislikes, our sinfulness and yet washes all that away even to the point of us rejecting that friend's love, and yet that friend loves us anyway, so much so that he dies for us. This is the love of Christ for you.

This Lenten season, this ash Wednesday we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We remember that we are fallen, sinful people, rejecting God over and over again. But today hear the words of Scripture and know that Jesus hears us, listens to us, and now is the acceptable time, the day of salvation. Now is the time to remember and hear that Christ has heard us and knows and forgives us of all things. Through his blood, his body, his forgiveness we are made right again with God. Let us hear as Christ hears, the love that is eternal in God.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you now and throughout this Lenten Season.
Amen

Let us pray for the whole People of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Lord Almighty, we gather before you this evening as humble, weak, servants of your creation. We come before you altar in prayer, to repent of all our sins and wrongs that we have done and have left undone. We come here faithfully to hear your Word and receive your forgiveness and we ask that you fill us once again with your love. Continue to lift us up, to make us new, washed of our sins, forgiven, and sent forth once again as your witnesses to your awesome love and mercy. We give you thanks for this great gift of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ your Son.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Almighty Creator, you breathed into the dirt and dust of the ground and gave us life, you made us out of dust and to dust we shall return. We come before you now as people who know of our limited life, our weaknesses and our pains and sorrows. We turn to you for hope and strength, for the salvation that will break us out of this life and give us new everlasting bodies in your heavenly kingdom. We come to your table this night and receive that forgiveness of sins, that blessing of the Holy Spirit and that gift of the promise of eternal salvation all won for us through the sacrifice of your own Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Gracious Father, we pray for your Holy Church. As servants of Christ we are given a freedom through the forgiveness of sins, to serve you and all people as you would have us do. As your witnesses to that glory, fully redeemed and forgiven, washed clean and made new we rise up to seek out those who still need to know of your glory. Use your church and all our members Lord, send us so that we may reach out to those burdened with pain and sinfulness, to show them your blessings and forgiveness. Empower us Lord fully reliant on you and your grace to be your workers in our community and beyond.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, there are many who seek your face this night Lord, those that face pain and sorrow, hardships and distress. There are also many Lord who do not even know of your love, or feel that they can not turn to you in righteousness. We ask on behalf of them also Lord, that you send down your Spirit to guide them to return to you and give them your spirit. So many people need to feel the freedom from pain, from guilt, from sickness, from fear, from anxiety and worry. Grant your healing spirit to lift up the afflicted, to strength those facing adversity, to stand beside those who are alone, to give hope to those

who are depressed. Be with all those that will be dealing with physical and mental anguish and grant them healing. With prayerful minds and heavy hearts we lift up all those needs and remember before you all those who are hospitalized, shut-ins, hurt and forgotten, and all those we mention now in our prayers to you.....

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.