

**2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:10** <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *NRS* 2 Corinthians 6:1 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup> We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup> truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

### Wide Open Spaces

In the year that Reagan beat Carter... you like how I'm telling time by politics now. I can't help it, it's almost my only hobby these days. I was in the – I hate to admit things like this because then it just makes me feel young – but I will admit it because it helps place the story for you. In the year that Reagan beat Carter, I was in the third grade. It was a leap year... I recently learned from Tim Murray that all presidential election years are leap years. Who knew?

And in the third grade, I was asked to give my first public presentation. I presented to the class what the fruits of the spirit were. It was public school, in fact it was a local public school. And it so happened that on that day, the principal was evaluating my teacher.

So my class, my teacher, and the principal heard about the fruit of the spirit. I had a song that went along with it. The fruit of the spirit is love... As I recall, and as my mother confirms, they called for an encore. You never have to wonder too much how a person becomes who they become.

My parents were part of the Jesus movement. And so when they asked me for an encore, all I had to offer was another Sunday school song... Beloved...

I was an ambassador at the age of 10.

Somehow in my 10 year old body, I understood that relationship with God was so universal, so attainable, so accessible that talking about it in public was the only logical thing to do. Would I do it now? I'm not sure.

When I think back to that experience, I think about how vulnerable I was. How open and transparent I was. How childlike I was. And then I wonder, Did Jesus really want us to be like children? Eek.

Because to be honest, I like the ways that I protect my heart and my relationships. I like the ways that I schedule my life and my activities to keep my self-interests a priority. I like to be in control of where my heart is exposed, and when it is most definitely placed within safe boundaries.

That's what we call it... setting healthy boundaries. Might I suggest that Lent is about breaking down boundaries. I'm not suggesting that those relationships that you have labored over for years to bring to health are to be undone. You know if that applies to you.

What I am suggesting is what Paul is suggesting... Here's how the Message translates the end of that passage.

*"I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!"*

Live openly and expansively!

Tear down the walls that separate us one from another. Cross the fence that keeps thee from interacting with me. Open a window to God, let in fresh air, a little light into the otherwise closed up room of your heart.

So often the role of religion is understood as a series of do nots, right? A series of rules, guidelines about how we ought to live. It's unfortunate really... because religion is meant to be a path toward God and toward one another. It's meant to be actions and attitudes that we adopt, so that relationship with God might seem so universal, so attainable, so accessible to the public.

Religion is meant to be our manner of becoming ambassadors, ever becoming more and more comfortable in our skin in relationship to God and one another.

And so before us are two pieces of religion, outward actions that reflect inward hopes and dreams.

The first – daring to name those “obstacles” in our lives that keep us from fully following Jesus Christ. Naming them and burning them, offering them to God's grace, for God's healing.

The second – bearing those obstacles together in the form of ashes – acknowledging our vulnerabilities and God's great love for us, even in our vulnerability.

Could this be the year that we live expansively? Could this be the year that God opens our hearts to more and more of God's thoughts and love and passion in and for our world?

I hope for you, as I long for you to hope for me that we enter this wide-open spacious life.